International Conference
in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon

Edited by

Zeev Sternhell

THE INTELLECTUAL REVOLT
AGAINST LIBERAL DEMOCRACY
1870–1945

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Contents

Preface

This collection is based on the lectures given at an international conference marking the tenth anniversary of the passing of Jacob Talmon, held in June 1990 under the auspices of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Since that conference took place, we have also seen the passing of Nathan Rotenstreich, without whose support and encouragement this meeting of minds would not have come to fruition. The memories of Talmon and of Rotenstreich, both of them pillars of the generation that shaped the visage of Israel's academic world, is borne in the hearts of all those who were privileged to be their students.

For reasons beyond the control of the organizers of the conference and of the editor, this volume is appearing only some six years after the papers printed here were written. Although the authors have done their best to update the material in the course of the book's preparation, they were unable to relate to new literature published in the last two or three years. This is undoubtedly a defect, but it detracts not at all from the worth of this volume or the arguments presented herein. On the contrary: since the process of preparing these texts for press began, no new publications have appeared that might weaken or alter the arguments of the authors of these studies. We have here not merely a collection of conference papers, but a solid, structured, cogent book, enhanced in breadth and variety of perspective by its multiple authorship.

In working on this book I have incurred a special debt of gratitude to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, where I was privileged to spend an extraordinarily enriching and stimulating year in 1991–1992. I wish especially to thank Charles Blitzer, the Center's director, Ann Sheffield, the director of fellowships, and Jim Morris, who chaired the meeting where some of the ideas expressed in this book were discussed.
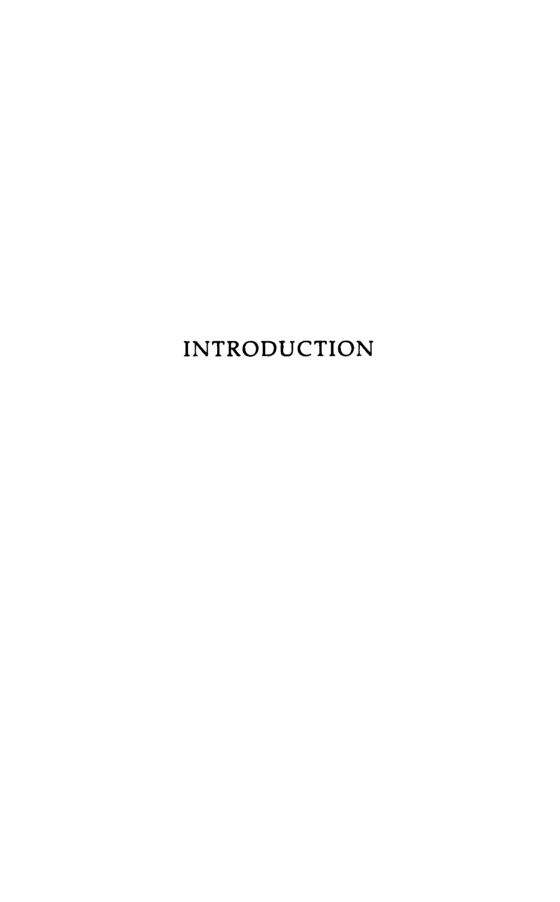
I would like here to express the gratitude of the conference's organizers to all of the bodies and institutions that made it possible: the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Van Leer Institute, the Jerusalem Foundation, the

Zeev Sternhell   Jerusalem, Spring 1996

INTRODUCTION

Zeev Sternhell

Modernity and Its Enemies:
From the Revolt against the Enlightenment
to the Undermining of Democracy

As Jürgen Habermas has shown, the idea of modernity reappears each time an awareness of the beginning of a new period emerges in Europe.[1] In a recent lecture at the Collège de France, Octavio Paz insisted on the relative aspect of the concept of modernity. The modern is by nature transitory, and the contemporary a highly provisional quality: there are as many modernities and antiquities as there are periods and societies, and the modern age will soon become tomorrow's antiquity.[2] And yet, we are all conscious of the fact that our particular modernity possesses a specific quality of its own which is very different from that experienced by people who also had a strong sense of their modernity, but who lived in the time of Charlemagne, in the twelfth century or even in the period of the Renaissance.

If our own modernity was originally understood as meaning a radical break with the past, a refusal to see the past — in this case, classical Antiquity — as a normative model, it is clear that the roots of this notion go back to the last years of the seventeenth century. With the celebrated 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes' (Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns) one finds a special hiatus, almost without precedent, which consecrates the term 'modernity' as a concept of revolt, innovation and criticism with regard to the glories of the past.

Initiated by Perrault, with his four-volume *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les Arts et les Sciences* (1688–1692), and by Fontenelle, with his *Digression sur les anciens et les modernes* (1688), the revolt of the Moderns began a long struggle which lasted until the third decade of the eighteenth century. The debate soon passed beyond the

1   J. Habermas, 'La Modernité — Un projet inachevé,' *Critique*, 413 (1981), p. 951. Cf. also J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, pp. 1–22.
2   O. Paz, 'Poésie et modernité,' *Le Débat*, September–December 1989, p. 4.

limits of purely literary questions to embrace linguistic, philosophical and political problems. The Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was in a sense the culmination of a tension intrinsic to the humanism of the Renaissance: the Ancients claimed to be the guardians of a classical and humanistic tradition, but of an authoritarian and aristocratic kind; while the Moderns, displaying a strongly critical spirit, represented a form of humanism with a democratic potential.[3]

In the eighteenth century, these new tendencies reached their culmination. With the French Enlightenment, the scientific and philosophical revolution of the preceding century came to maturity, and it was then that the idea of an infinite progress of knowledge, of a continual progression towards a better and more moral society, came into being; it was then that the universalistic foundations of morality and law were developed and applied to politics. The rationalism, optimism and universalism of the Enlightenment, the quasi-absolute faith in science, found immediate concretization in the aspiration towards a rational transformation of political and social life.

The Enlightenment was the age of criticism, and criticism, conceived as a method of investigation, creation and action, is the distinctive feature of modernity: criticism of religion, philosophy, morality, law, history, economics and politics. The principal ideas of the modern age — progress, revolution, liberty, democracy — ensued from criticism.[4] It was the rational criticism of certitudes and traditional values — and in the first place, religion — which produced the theory of the rights of man, the principle of the primacy of the individual with regard to society, and the idea that the well-being and happiness of the individual are always the final objectives of any political action. It was the rational criticism of the existing order which allowed society to be conceived as an aggregate of individuals and the state as an instrument in the hands of the individual. It was thus criticism that produced our hedonistic and utilitarian vision of society and the state, without which neither liberalism, nor democracy, nor socialism was possible. And criticism, taking on traditional metaphysics, produced the categorical imperative, which remains the true symbol of the Enlightenment and its noblest expression.

The instrumental use of reason for the good of the individual thus appears to be one of the characteristic features of modernity. So, too,

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3   R.L. Nelson, 'The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns,' in D. Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, pp. 364–365.

4   O. Paz, 'Poésie' (above, note 2), pp. 4–5.

is the idea of human perfectibility: in the eighteenth century, the individual came to be regarded as the agent of history, responsible for his own fate. The emancipation of the human agent, in the sense that Kant gave this process, found its concrete expression in the French Revolution. The Revolution also translated into political terms the historical vision of the Enlightenment, a linear vision which conceived the future as the realization of the utopian projects of the present.[5] It was thus through the French Revolution, which was the major attempt at the concretization of the rationalistic utopia of the Enlightenment, that modernity was concretely identified with progress. 'Utopias,' said Octavio Paz, 'are the dreams of reason: active dreams which are turned into revolutions and reforms.'[6]

Indeed, the idea that men are able, in a rational manner, to create a better future is in many ways the very essence of modernity. The fact that the concept of utopia has never been so discredited as in the year of the bicentenary of the French Revolution is not without significance for the evaluation of the dominant ideological trends of our own age. The negation of the intrinsic value of the utopian idea is only another way of undermining the foundations of modernity. Conversely, if there is one conclusion that we can draw from the controversies about post-modernism and deconstruction which have troubled the last decade, it is precisely that the utopia of the Enlightenment always remains the most solid and perhaps the only ground on which a better, more just and freer society can be constructed.

To this day, no system of thought has been invented which, for the good of mankind and society, can improve on the rationalistic criticism, universalistic humanism and faith in progress of the eighteenth century. This is demonstrated forcefully in the famous debate between Cassirer and Heidegger on Kant, held in Davos in 1929, as the crisis of European civilization was coming to a head. A few years later, at a lecture to the *Kulturbund* in Vienna in May 1935, Husserl made one final attempt at sounding the alarm against the dismissal of rationalism: 'The crisis of existence in Europe,' he said, 'which is revealed by innumerable symptoms of mortal peril, is not some dark fate, some inscrutable destiny.' The cause of this crisis was not 'the essence of rationalism itself, but only its alienation, the fact that it becomes immersed in naturalism and objectivism.'[7] In the face of the antagonisms which

5   G. Latraverse & W. Moser (eds.), 'Avant-Propos,' in *Vienne au tournant du siècle*, Paris 1988, pp. 9–10.

6   O. Paz, 'Poésie' (above, note 2), p. 5.

7   E. Husserl, *La Crise de l'humanité européenne et la philosophie*, Paris 1976, p. 31.

were constantly dividing the European nations, Husserl affirmed their common cultural heritage; in the face of the naturalist deviation, he maintained that there was 'essentially no zoology of peoples,' and in the face of the irrationalism of Heidegger's followers, he asserted his fundamentally different conception of the naive rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[8] 'I, too, am certain,' he said, 'that the crisis of Europe has its roots in the deviations of rationalism, but that is no reason to maintain that rationalism as such is bad in itself, or that it is of secondary importance in human existence as a whole.'[9] By then, however, it was too late to stop the onslaught of those forces which represented a triumph of anti-enlightenment values.

It is no accident that all the enemies of modernity since the end of the nineteenth century have singled out Kant and Rousseau for attack. From Nietzsche, who condemned 'the ... stiff and decorous tartuffery of the old Kant,'[10] to the French Personalists at the time of the 1940 defeat, it was always the eighteenth century which was held responsible for Europe's decadence and decomposition. Sorel and Le Bon, Unamuno and the Spaniards of the generation of 1898, the English vorticists and the German Revolutionary Conservatives all reached the same conclusion.

Strong irrationalist tendencies were the common denominator of this vision of the world, as summarized by Miguel de Unamuno: 'Hegel made famous his aphorism that all that is rational is real and all that is real is rational. But there are many of us who, not convinced by Hegel, carry on believing that the real, the really real, is irrational, and that reason is built upon irrationalities.'[11] Robert Musil, for his part, sought to demonstrate that rationalist thought, which had been rich two centuries before, had degenerated by the end of the nineteenth century into a 'despicable and ridiculous' positivism. He described the antirationalistic reaction of the turn of the century as 'a need for the irrational, for the fullness of facts, for reality.'[12]

In *The Man without Qualities*, Musil analyzed the evils of pre-1914 European culture in terms which in many respects strongly recall

8   *Ibid.*, p. 4 (Preface by the translator).
9   *Ibid.*, p. 20.
10 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil — Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated with commentary by W. Kaufman, New York 1966, p. 13.
11 Quoted in A. Dobson, *An Introduction to the Politics and Philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset*, Cambridge, U.K., 1989. On Unamuno cf. also M. Nozick, *Miguel de Unamuno —The Agony of Belief*, Princeton 1982.
12 Quoted in D.S. Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880–1942*, Berkeley, Calif., 1980, p. 154.

those used by Maurice Barrès, his predecessor by thirty years, in *Les Déracinés* (The Uprooted). While it would be difficult to imagine two writers as different by origin, training and personal experience as Musil and Barrès, they had a common denominator: Nietzsche. Nietzsche was the dominant intellectual force of Musil's formative years;[13] while Barrès, imbued with Nietzsche's rejection of modernity, characteristically described 'the rationalist idea' as 'antagonistic to life and its spontaneous forms.'[14] Rousseau's great sin, as he saw it, was to have sterilized life by trying to rationalize it.[15]

Barrès, in many respects the father of the French political novel, had the greatest influence of any French writer on the generation of the end of the century. He was not only well known in the Latin countries of Europe and South America; he also had considerable influence in Vienna, and his work left its mark on Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Hermann Bahr.[16] But the appeal to intuition, to instinct, to the will, to the deep forces of the soul and the unconscious as against the artificial domain of the rational was common in that period. This explains the nature of the struggle against modernity. 'In all essential points,' wrote Nietzsche, referring to *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'this book is a criticism of *modernity*, including modern science, modern art, even modern politics.'[17]

Let us note in passing (we shall return to this later on) that Nietzsche's thought was not, as has often been said, apolitical. For Nietzsche, the 'Enlightenment' (he put 'Enlightenment' in inverted commas, like all the other key words of the liberal lexicon: 'liberty,' 'progress,' 'future,' 'scientific spirit,' etc.) had 'something revolting about it.'[18] It gave rise to the French Revolution, 'that gruesome farce which, considered closely, was quite superfluous,' and which marked the beginning of 'the last great slave rebellion.'[19] For modernity, according to Nietzsche, derives from a single source: the slave morality, which

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13 P. Payne, *Robert Musil's 'The Man without Qualities,'* Cambridge, U.K., 1988, pp. 20 and 25.

14 M. Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, Paris 1934–1936, IX, p. 24.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 290, and VIII, pp. 77–78. Cf. also X, pp. 99 and 219, and VIII, p. 161. On these questions cf. Z. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, Brussels 1986.

16 R. Stablein, 'Dissociation du sujet et culte du moi — La réception de la décadence barrèsienne par Hugo von Hofmannsthal et Hermann Bahr,' in Latraverse & Moser (eds.), 'Avant-Propos' (above, note 5), pp. 217–257.

17 F. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, New York, Modern Library (n.d.), p. 114. Cf. also idem, *Beyond Good and Evil* (above, note 10), pp. 118–150, 191–192.

18 Idem, *Beyond Good and Evil* (above, note 10), p. 61. Cf. also pp. 153 and 206.

19 *Ibid* , pp. 49 and 61.

is 'essentially a morality of utility,' for which humanism, progress, altruism, egalitarianism, hedonism, utilitarianism and eudemonism are merely different expressions.[20] Translated into political terms, that means democracy, liberalism and socialism. In more general terms, the 'slave morality' amounts to decadence.

In one way or another, these ideas were taken up by Sorel, Maurras, Spengler, T.E. Hulme, Ortega y Gasset, Carl Schmitt and many others. All of them were fascinated by the decadence which they felt to be synonymous with what Nietzsche called 'the century of the masses,' and which social psychology after Le Bon called 'the age of the crowds.' They watched with apprehension the rise of 'the herd animal, man,'[21] who claimed to possess free will and to create values. The idea that only a cultivated elite is capable of rising above the herd and creating new values was the cornerstone of the social sciences at the turn of the century. Elitism was characteristic not only of what is generally called the Italian school of political sociology, but also of the work of Durkheim and Max Weber, not to mention that of Gumplowicz, which deeply influenced the thought of Mosca.

It was the historical opus of Hippolyte Taine, however, which served as the primary source of inspiration for the elitist theoreticians. For Taine, the French Revolution had the character of a real cultural disaster. It was to be explained as the revenge of the inferior and the weak against the great and powerful, as a plebeian reaction against the natural masters. The fall of the old France was possible only because the elites had given way before the vile populace. This analysis of the causes of the Revolution gave the young Sicilian Gaetano Mosca the idea of expanding Taine's explanation into a general law of the evolution of societies. It is not surprising that Nietzsche considered Taine 'the foremost historian now living.'[22] There can be no doubt that Taine's dread of Jacobinism left a profound mark on Nietzsche's thought.

Nietzsche's contribution to the revolt against the philosophy of the Enlightenment was all the more significant and revealing in that this manifestation of antihumanism was also a manifestation of the most consistent cosmopolitanism. No major thinker at the end of the nineteenth century had a deeper sense of the cultural unity of Europe, and none was more vigorously opposed to xenophobia

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 207 and 153.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

and antisemitism.[23] None despised nationalism more than he did, and no German of his time so abominated German nationalism and its prophets, beginning with Treitschke. If Nietzsche opposed nationalism, however, it was because he had a horror of the 'herd morality,' egalitarianism and democracy. He saw nationalism only as a particularly violent and hateful aspect of the democratic movement, just as socialism was another facet of the same evil.[24] His drive to undermine the foundations of universalism, egalitarianism and democracy required adherence neither to nationalism nor to antisemitism. Gobineau, too, was neither a nationalist nor an antisemite.

However, the element that was missing in Nietzsche was to be found in Heidegger, whose irrationalistic tendencies were accompanied by a strong *volkisch* dimension. It is interesting to note how much Heidegger's tone in speaking of the Black Forest resembles that of Barrès evoking his native Lorraine. Heidegger opposed the Black Forest to Berlin in the same way that Barrès, the major nationalist writer of his time and one of the very first in Europe to define his thought, even before the end of the nineteenth century, as 'national socialism,' contrasted rural Lorraine with Paris. One's native soil was regarded as the only effective barrier against Kantian deracination, disintegration and the moral corruption of bourgeois society. For Heidegger, as for Barrès, common folk, because they were simple and close to nature, were a source of social sanity and moral rectitude, and thus the only element capable of re-creating the organic unity of a nation destroyed by modernization.

In moments of doubt, when he had to make a particularly difficult decision, Heidegger asked the advice of the earth:

> Recently I got a second invitation to the University of Berlin. On such an occasion I leave the city and go back to my cabin. I hear what the mountains and woods and farmyards say. On the way I drop in on my old friend, a seventy-five-year-old farmer. He has read in the newspaper about the Berlin invitation. What will he say? He slowly presses the sure glance of his clear eyes against mine, holds his mouth tightly closed, lays his faithful and cautious hand on my shoulder — almost imperceptibly shakes his head. That means: absolutely No![25]

23 *Ibid.*, §§ 251 and 241.
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 115–118.
25 Quoted in T.A. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Evanston, Ill., 1973, p. 54.

The same applies to the characters of Barrès's novels. The young men of Lorraine, in order to overcome the influence of their Kantian teacher and cleanse themselves of those 'vague, floating humanities they had been taught in high school,' went back to nature by taking a walk along the banks of the Moselle, in accordance with the principle that 'the enlightenment of the individual consciousness' is attainable only through 'a knowledge of one's dead and one's soil.'[26] The formula *la terre et les morts* (the soil and the dead) is the French equivalent of *Blut und Boden: volkisch* thought was not limited to Germany and was not a German monopoly. In this connection, a comparison with France is particularly instructive.

Despite the great difference between its history and that of Germany, France, too, after having produced the only successful liberal revolution on the European continent, harboured a deep-seated revolt against the eighteenth century and modernity. Illogical though it may seem at first sight, France also had identity problems. The crisis of liberalism was no less profound in the most advanced liberal society on the continent than it was in Germany, Italy or Austria.

By the turn of the century, revulsion against modernity had become a profound social phenomenon. Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, published in 1890, was an instant commercial success: more than forty printings were sold out in the first two years. A few year earlier, Paris had watched in amazement as Drumont's *La France Juive* emerged as the greatest best-seller of the end of the century. The rise of antisemitism as an ideology and a social phenomenon was one of the essential features of the crisis of modernity and of liberalism. The organic nationalism of Barrès and Maurras and the antisemitism of Drumont, Guérin and Morès were in no way inferior to the antisemitism of Wagner, Marr, Treitschke, von Schönerer or Lueger. If Paris did not have an antisemitic mayor at exactly the same time that Karl Lueger took over Vienna's City Hall, it was only because the French capital, since the Commune, no longer had an elected mayor. A few months after 'der schöne Karl' was appointed mayor of Vienna, the French Parliament awarded 158 votes to a bill that, had it passed, would have constituted a *de facto* revocation of the emancipation of the Jews.[27]

The crisis of liberalism, of adaptation to the mass society and the politics of the masses, was a general European phenomenon. Social psychology, led by Le Bon and Sighele, taught that the masses were

26 Cf. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès* (above, note 15), pp. 298ff.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

activated by myths, and politics was thus the art of manipulating men's instincts, emotions and fears. Meanwhile, democratization meant not only the introduction of universal suffrage but also cultural integration, and it was precisely cultural integration which permitted a real national integration. It soon turned out that the spread of literacy, compulsory education and the reading of newspapers had produced a totally unexpected result: the acquisition of culture by the masses was to the advantage neither of liberalism nor of socialism, but chiefly benefitted nationalism. 'We can wait. Knowledge liberates,' said an Austrian liberal in 1861.[28] A generation later, such optimism was no longer possible. It was obvious by then that democracy and culture had not turned the boors of yesterday into enlightened citizens with universal values. Nowhere was the disappointment greater than in France, and nowhere did it have greater significance for the whole of Europe.

Indeed, nothing better illustrates the enormous difficulties encountered by liberal democracy in responding to the social aspirations and emotional needs of the new urban masses than the similarity of the obstacles which appeared both in the first nation-state of the European continent and in the multinational empire of the Hapsburgs. This was the real significance of the Dreyfus Affair. In the very last years of the century, some of the liberals and socialists who had engaged in this extraordinary battle, at once a merciless political struggle and an unprecedented collective moral drama, perceived with dismay that the people could be made to believe or do anything. The sovereign people was merely a vile multitude with sordid instincts. It seemed that Gustave Le Bon had not been so wrong after all. 'One can no longer deny it,' wrote Clemenceau. 'It is with the complicity of the people itself that the evil is amongst us. .... The people does not want to know [the truth.] It is the greatest evil on earth.'[29]

Indeed, the image of democracy was in no way improved by the agitation of the end of the century. How could it have been otherwise, when the most zealous defenders of universal suffrage, the will of the people and courts of justice were the antisemitic groups? The loss of faith in the intrinsic virtues of democracy, the new-found conviction that the law of the majority was not necessarily that of liberty and justice, was a grave portent for the future of democracy.

In the general attack on the emancipatory function of the Enlightenment, liberalism and socialism were revealed to have common

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28 Quoted in C. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York 1981, p. 134.
29 G. Clemenceau, *Contre la justice*, Paris 1900, p. v.

enemies. According to their cultural critics, liberalism and socialism both sinned by way of a similar humanism, a similar universalism, a similar utilitarianism. In a revealing passage from his essay, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), Carl Schmitt stressed the indissoluble connection between Marxism and liberalism, which derived from their common materialist character: 'If one has followed the bourgeois into economic terrain, then one must also follow him into democracy and parliamentarianism.'[30] It may be said that with Marxism, the philosophy of the Enlightenment gained a new dimension: at his death, Marx was the last of the rationalists. Nietzsche captured this very well when he said that 'the boors and imbeciles of socialism' were as despicable and pernicious as Locke, Bentham and John Stuart Mill.[31]

All these antimodernistic tendencies were brought together most perfectly in the thought of Thomas Ernst Hulme, a truly paradigmatic figure who was all the more fascinating because he was outside the Germano-Austrian and Franco-Italian cultural spheres. Killed in the War in September 1917 at the age of thirty-four, Hulme was an exceptional personality. Though his friend, the well-known sculptor Jacob Epstein, may have exaggerated in comparing him to Socrates and Plato, there is no doubt that this young philosopher was marked out, as Bergson said of him, 'to produce interesting and important works.'[32] Hulme had translated Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* and Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, and he was an extraordinary transmitter of ideas, who compelled recognition by the force of his personality. All those who have left memoirs describing London's intellectual life at the turn of the century have remarked on the impact of his presence,[33] seeing in him the leading figure of the intellectual scene of his time.

At the centre of his thought was a violent attack on humanism, human perfectibility and the idea of progress. His harshest criticisms were aimed at that 'on which everything really depends': 'these abstract conceptions of the nature of man' and the idea that existence is, or should be, the source of all values.[34] Hulme condemned the spirit and art of the Renaissance (Donatello, Michelangelo, Marlowe), an era in which a new psychology and a new anthropology had given rise to a

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30 C. Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (English transl. by E. Kennedy), Cambridge, Mass., 1985, p. 73.
31 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (above, note 10), p. 118.
32 Cf. the Preface and Introduction to T.E. Hulme, *Speculations — Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. H. Read, London 1954, pp. viii and x.
33 Cf. T.E. Hulme, *Further Speculations*, ed. Sam Hunes, Minneapolis 1955, pp. vii–xiv.
34 Hulme, *Speculations* (above, note 32), pp. 58 and 47.

harmful philosophy, which in turn passed on its conceptual framework to ethical and political systems that were no less injurious (Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza). While Hulme, to be sure, did not deny that this humanism might possess a certain attraction and that it had heroic origins, he claimed that it could only lead to 'a sentimental, utilitarian romanticism':

> [It] was bound sooner or later to end in Rousseau. There is a parallel development in art. Just as humanism leads to Rousseau, so Michaelangelo leads to Greuze.[35]

The contempt that Hulme felt for Rousseau was equalled only by his admiration for Pascal. Humanism, for him, represented what was false; the antihumanistic vision represented what was true. Fortunately, he thought, humanism seemed to be coming to an end.[36]

To the humanistic conception of human nature, to faith in the perfectibility of the individual and in progress, Hulme opposed the religious conception, based on the idea of original sin and the fall of man.[37] That is why he was so hostile to romanticism: underlying romanticism and the French Revolution was the Rousseauist conception of the individual. Rousseau, he said, taught the men of the eighteenth century that 'man was by nature good,' that he was 'an infinite reservoir of possibilities' and that at the root of all evils lay 'bad laws.' According to Rousseau, the destruction of that oppressive order would open up infinite horizons of progress. Classicism, said Hulme, was defined by an exactly opposite conception, namely, that 'man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him.'[38]

Hulme rejected the idea that the individual should aim at the spontaneous development of his personality. Such a conception, he thought, deformed the nature of ethical values, in that it derived them from subjective and therefore egoistical phenomena such as individual desires and sentiments. It was the logical result of humanism, and it led to romanticism. Fortunately, however, an antihumanistic revival was now, since the beginning of the century, expressing itself in a transformation of literature, society and politics, in accordance with

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35 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–62.
36 *Ibid.*, pp. 55–57. Cf. also p. 31.
37 *Ibid.*, pp. 68–71. Cf. also p. 256.
38 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–62.

principles that were 'classical' in the sense that the *Action française* gave to the term.

Such was the conceptual framework which, in the years before World War I, Thomas Hulme passed on to Yeats, Pound, Lewis and T.S. Eliot. They were all agreed in rejecting the humanistic tradition, and they all rebelled with extreme violence against democracy.[39] For Eliot, writing in 1924, Hulme was the great precursor of a new state of mind, characteristic of the twentieth century. He was 'classical, reactionary and revolutionary ... the antipode of the eclectic, tolerant and democratic mind of the last century.'[40] Hulme, indeed, was a protagonist of a new type of revolution.

A follower of the intuitive philosophy of Bergson,[41] he immediately grasped the importance of Sorel. By the time he began to exert his authority within London's avant-garde circles, he had already assimilated the main arguments of the *Reflections on Violence*. No one has given a more precise definition of the place of Sorel in the history of ideas, describing him as 'a revolutionary who is antidemocratic, an absolutist in ethics, rejecting all rationalism and relativism, who ... speaks contemptuously of modernism and *progress*, and uses a concept like *honour* with no sense of unreality.'[42]

What appealed to him in Sorel was precisely the profoundly antihumanist, antirationalist and antidemocratic quality of the *Reflections on Violence*, and, of course, its pessimism and classicism. It was his pessimistic conception of man which underlay his conviction that 'the transformation of society is an heroic task requiring heroic qualities ... virtues which are not likely to flourish on the soil of a rational and sceptical ethic.'[43] With Sorel, said Hulme, the pacifistic, hedonistic and rationalistic system of ideas that still dominated the intellectual scene would be swept back. Hulme concluded by saying that for all those who were beginning to be disenchanted with liberal democracy, Sorel would appear as 'an emancipator.'[44]

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Wyndham Lewis, too, found Sorel 'the key to all contemporary political thought,' a

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39 J.R. Harrison, *The Reactionaries: Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence — A Study of the Anti-democratic Intelligentsia*, New York 1967, pp. 30–33.

40 T.S. Eliot, quoted in H.R. Jones, *The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme*, London 1960, p. 14.

41 Cf. especially Hulme, *Speculations* (above, note 34), pp. 173–214, and *Further Speculations* (above, note 33), pp. 28–63.

42 Hulme, *Speculations* (above, note 32), p. 250.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 257.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 254 and 258–260.

symptomatic figure whom it would be hard to equal.[45] Carl Schmitt, coming from a totally different milieu, was fascinated by Sorel in the same way: for him 'the theory of myth is the most powerful symptom of the decline of the relative rationalism of parliamentary thought.'[46] Ortega y Gasset went even further: 'When the reconstruction of the origins of our epoch is undertaken, it will be observed that the first notes of its special harmony were sounded in those groups of French syndicalists and realists of about 1900, inventors of the method and the name of "direct action".'[47]

Since the end of the nineteenth century, this cultural revolt has found its conceptual framework in the idea of antimaterialism. To be sure, Tocqueville too had been horrified by the materialism of the masses, but he tried to neutralize it, as far as possible, not by undermining democracy but by improving it. It was only with Renan that the concept of materialism became not only a major factor of historical explanation, but also an instrument in the struggle against democracy. After predicting that the nineteenth century 'will be regarded in the history of France as the expiation of the Revolution,' Renan attacked the 'democratic spirit ... which can be well described as materialism in politics,' and which ultimately could only give rise to 'a sort of universal mediocrity.'[48] Though he made this analysis in a long essay published before the Franco-Prussian War, the defeat of 1870 gave it a dramatic dimension. Renan continued his campaign in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, arguing that 'materialism' was the summation of what he called 'the sickness of France.'[49] Democracy and socialism were forms of materialism, but there was also a 'bourgeois materialism'[50] that was yet another aspect of that same mediocrity which had carried all before it since the end of the eighteenth century. It was materialism that had caused the decadence of France, and it was liberal and bourgeois materialism that were defeated in 1870.

An identical view appears in Wagner's 'German Art and German Policy': for him, too, European culture had 'reached the abyss of

45 W. Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, London 1926, p. 128; cf. also pp. 407–409.
46 Schmitt, *The Crisis* (above, note 30), pp. 68–76.
47 J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, London 1961, pp. 56–57.
48 E. Renan, 'La monarchie constitutionnelle en France,' *La Revue des deux mondes*, LXXXIV (1869), pp. 73, 75 and 92.
49 E. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, Paris, Union Generale d'editions, Col. 10/18 (n.d.), p. 29.
50 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

sordidest materialism.'[51] For Treitschke, the responsibility for this decadence lay with the Jews, who 'share heavily in the guilt for the contemptible materialism of our age.'[52]

Seventy years later, at the time of the 1940 defeat, the same analysis — yet totally free of any kind of antisemitism — and the same general approach reappeared in the work of the left-wing Catholic Emmanuel Mounier. Once again, the collapse was blamed on individualism, the French Revolution, bourgeois liberalism and communism: it was 'a certain form of Western civilization' that had been defeated.[53] Like Renan in 1870, Mounier did not discover the dangers of liberal democracy only after the military debacle. Throughout the 1930s, Mounier had expressed his sympathy for attacks on materialism coming from the most varied quarters. While praising Hendrik de Man's 'critique of determinist materialism,' he also expressed satisfaction at the revolt of the French young Right, led by Thierry Maulnier. Maulnier was the intellectual leader of the French equivalent of the German Conservative Revolution, and an ardent admirer of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (he wrote the Introduction to the French edition of Moeller's *Third Reich*) and Ernst von Salomon. Mounier drew a comparison between Maulnier's analysis and de Man's: both were praised for their opposition to liberalism and Marxism, and for their unconditional struggle against materialism.[54] In the name of their common antimaterialism, Mounier had similar praise for the Italian Fascist Left.

At a symposium organized in Rome in May 1935 by the left-wingers of the Italian Fascist party and a group of French admirers and fellow-travellers, Mounier stated that 'even those in the French delegation who by their training had been staunch opponents of Fascism publicly

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51 R. Wagner, 'German Art and German Policy,' in *Wagner on Music and Drama — A Selection from Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, London 1977, p. 439.

52 H. von Treitschke, *A Word About Our Jewry*, Cincinnati, Ohio (n.d.), p. 4.

53 On 25 October 1940 the American Catholic journal *The Commonwealth* published a message from Mounier under the title 'Letter from France — A Personalist Leader, Editor of *Esprit*, Sends This Message to America from France' (pp. 8–11); cf. John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left 1930–1959*, Toronto 1981. Mounier wrote: 'The first step to take is to place oneself on the scale of vision of the man who at this moment has taken the initiative in the history of Europe. Herr Hitler on several occasions has declared that he envisions his policies on the scale of a thousand years. The "realists" smile. But on reflection this perspective would seem a bit narrow' (p. 8).

54 E. Mounier, 'Thierry Maulnier — Au-delà-du Nationalisme,' *Esprit*, 69 (1938), pp. 442–443.

admitted the close kinship they felt with the constructive vigour of the new generation.'[55] He expressed his rejection of the entire 'bourgeois civilization' that was now being challenged by the 'Fascist civilizations.' Although he recognized and understood the totalitarian character of Fascism, he could not help but feel attracted by its total rejection of the liberal and bourgeois world, its 'revolutionary negation of bourgeois rationalism.'[56]

When Mussolini gave his classic definition of Fascism in 1932, he described it as a revolt against 'the materialist and feeble positivism of the nineteenth century.'[57] A year later, upon the founding of the Spanish Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera began his speech with an attack on Rousseau.[58] Drieu la Rochelle expressed the same sentiment in 1940: 'France has been destroyed by rationalism.'[59]

The personalists of the 1930s provide an instructive example of the attraction exerted by both Fascism and Nazism.[60] They did express some reservations, but these concerned the practice of Nazism; they were in full sympathy with the Nazi revolt that was directed simultaneously against liberalism and Marxism. 'National-Socialism' was to be praised, said Alexandre Marc, a converted Jew and a prominent personalist intellectual, because it 'manifests a desire to break with materialism.'[61] This was a central point in the long 'letter to Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of the Reich' published in November 1933 by the Robert Aron-Arnaud Dandieu group (Robert Aron, a Jew, was later persecuted by the Vichy regime). Nazism had 'grandeur' because it was a 'legitimate revolt against modern materialism.'[62]

These texts are highly characteristic of the reasons for the attraction which Fascism exerted upon many intellectuals. If Mounier worked until the end of 1942 for the Vichy government's National Revolution,

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55 E. Mounier, 'Esprit au Congrès franco-italien sur la corporation,' *Esprit*, 33 (1935), p. 475.
56 E. Mounier, *Oeuvres*, Paris 1961, I (1931–1939), pp. 499–500.
57 B. Mussolini, *La Dottrina del Fascismo*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. E. Susmel & D. Susmel, Florence 1962, XXXIV, p. 118.
58 J.A. Primo de Rivera, *Selected Writings*, ed. Hugh Thomas, London 1972, p. 49.
59 P. Drieu la Rochelle, *Notes pour comprendre le siècle*, Paris 1941, p. 171. Cf. also A. Jaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality — Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life*, Minneapolis 1986, p. 92.
60 Z. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left — Fascist Ideology in France*, Berkeley 1986, pp. 273–291.
61 A. Marc, 'Hitler ou la Revolution Manquée,' *L'Ordre Nouveau*, 2 (1933), pp. 29–30.
62 'Lettre à Adolf Hitler, Chancelier du Reich,' *L'Ordre Nouveau*, 5 (1933), pp. 12, and 16. Cf. also pp. 4–6, 13–14 and 19–20.

it was not because of any lack of political judgement. Similarly, Heidegger's attitude towards the Nazi regime is to be explained not by opportunism, but by a certain community of ideas. In his lectures of that period, Heidegger spoke of the 'intimate truth and grandeur' of National Socialism.[63] The terms used correspond to those of the French personalists. Habermas emphasizes that when these lectures were published in 1953, Heidegger did not in any way dissociate himself from his 1935 text. In this connection, Habermas has correctly pointed out that if there was no Nazi intelligentsia as such, that was only because the mediocrity of the Nazi leaders rendered them incapable of accepting the intellectuals' offers of service.[64]

This was one of the great differences between Fascism and Nazism. In Italy, the intellectuals played a prominent role in both the founding of the movement and its rise to power, and in the codification of the system. The privileged circle of the founders of the regime included not only Marinetti, followed by a considerable number of avant-garde artists, but also eminent academics such as Michels and Panunzio. The role of Gentile is well known; Pirandello was a member of the Fascist Academy. Mosca had but a few inoffensive remarks to make about the regime, and he served under it as a senator. Pareto, who died in 1923, never concealed his sympathy for the Fascist movement. It would be difficult, indeed, to find a single major social scientist who did not have very serious doubts, one way or another, not only about the praxis of liberal democracy, but also, and above all, about its principles. After all, the very emergence of psychology, sociology and political science as autonomous fields of research and teaching was rooted not only in a reaction against Marxism, but also in a critique of democracy.

When it finally did appear, the opposition of the intellectuals was directed far more against the brutality of the newly established regimes than against their ideologies. Hence, one finds a great deal of ambiguity and contradiction both in their thinking and in their actions. They were often confounded by the cunning of history, for the concrete forms taken by the eagerly awaited antimaterialistic rebellions did not always correspond to the hopes of their sensitive spirits. For example, though Croce became a dissident in 1925, his famous anti-Fascist 'Manifesto of the Intellectuals' cannot obscure the support he gave the Fascists in the critical years of their seizure of power. A strong intervention with the

63 J. Habermas, *Profils philosophiques et politiques*, Paris 1974, p. 91.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

king by the liberals might have led to Mussolini's dismissal after the assassination on 10 June 1924 of Matteotti, whose courage and moral strength were legendary. The event had left Mussolini's entourage in a panic. At that critical moment, Croce decided that Fascism had, after all, done a great deal of good and that it would be most inadvisable to work for its downfall. On 26 June, Senator Croce gave a vote of confidence to the Mussolini government.

In Spain, Ortega y Gasset placed himself in the Republican camp in 1931, only to join the opposition a year later. During the Civil War he hoped for a Nationalist victory, but he went into exile a few months after Franco's seizure of power. Unamuno, after being dismissed from his post as Rector of the University of Salamanca by the Republican government in 1936, was removed from the same post at the end of that year by the Franco regime.[65]

Spengler, Jünger and Freyer, each in his own way, distanced themselves from the Nazi regime, but not for intellectual reasons. The brutality and vulgarity of the new rulers made it difficult for the intellectuals to relate to them. It was one thing to engage in learned discourse about the slave morality, to deplore the decadence of bourgeois society and passionately oppose its materialism; it was quite another to accept state terrorism as a normative form of government. But their later rejection could not undo the concrete results of their obsessive criticism of the heritage of the Enlightenment. The proponents of the Conservative Revolution did National Socialism a great service, by helping to lead the upper classes into the Third Reich.[66] The victims of the July 1944 hangings included several who had joyfully welcomed the rise of Nazism.

In France, too, some of the protagonists and admirers of the great antimaterialistic revolution ended by taking up arms against the Nazis, or becoming their first victims. Meanwhile, however, a century and a half of republican tradition was swept away in the course of six months. The Vichy racial legislation of October 1940 set the seal on the destruction of the principles of the French Revolution. The National Revolution is hardly imaginable without the long antimaterialistic gestation that preceded it. Of course, the cultural rebellion in France did not overthrow democracy on its own: it was the German war machine which bore the direct responsibility. But when the Republic

65 Dobson, *An Introduction*, pp. 31–35; and Nozick, *Miguel de Unamuno*, p. 33 (both above, note 11).
66 F. Stern, *Dreams and Delusions*, New York 1987, pp. 156–157; cf. also pp. 164–165.

fell, the ideological framework for an alternative solution was fully in place.

Thus, everywhere in Europe, there was an antidemocratic, antiuniversalistic *doxa*. It undoubtedly owed more to a vulgarization of major works than to the great works themselves, but if it did not always truly reflect all the nuances of high culture, it nevertheless represented the principal ideas that had been brewing.

Here, finally, we come to the classic but already banal question of the responsibility of the intellectual. No writer can be held responsible for consequences of his teaching which he did not intend. But on the other hand, an intellectual operates in a specific historical context, and his work does have consequences. Even Nietzsche's spiritual constructions and aesthetic preferences had immediate political implications, as he himself was well aware. We can hardly imagine, then, that Heidegger, in the highly charged emotional climate of the 1930s, was unconscious of the significance which both his teaching and his activities had suddenly assumed. The celebrated apoliticism of the German universities in fact represented a profound antidemocratic and antiliberal conformism. Elsewhere in Europe, no major intellectual really claimed to stand outside political controversy. If there was, in Julien Benda's words, an 'intellectual betrayal,' it consisted not in a rejection of politics, but in the engagement of so many intellectuals in the battle against the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Neither the criticism of liberal democracy, nor unemployment, inflation or military defeat necessarily had to lead to Fascism, Nazism or the various forms of the National Revolution. It was the combination of all these factors that gave rise to the crisis of the 1920s and 1930s. However — and this is a very important point — everywhere in Europe, the political revolt was preceded by the cultural one. It is the *cultural revolt*, with the participation both of those who engaged in political activism and of those who protected their 'purity' by staying out of practical politics, which explains the ascendancy of the Fascist or semi-Fascist movements and regimes. The desire to purify the world of the defilements of the eighteenth century and to introduce various forms of discipline such as classicism and nationalism, together with the rejection of liberal and bourgeois decadence, united in a single momentum the inner core of Fascist intellectuals and the extensive external circles of fellow-travellers.

The waffling of many intellectuals undoubtedly was nurtured by fear that the higher culture might be swamped by the mass society. As Ortega y Gasset wrote:

The characteristic of our time is not that the vulgar believes itself super-excellent and not vulgar, but that the vulgar proclaims and imposes the rights of vulgarity, or vulgarity as a right.[67]

What is truly essential, however, and what gives the cultural revolt its political significance, is the fact that this rejection of the mass society was directed first of all against democracy: against the masses casting ballots, against the masses going on strike, against the May Day rallies and, in short, against the demand for equality. Thus, it was only very rarely that the revolt was directed against those mass movements *par excellence* which were the nationalist and Fascist movements. The reason was simple: these were mass movements of an unprecedented kind. Their elitist and anti-egalitarian character immunized them against this kind of criticism. The great virtues of the Fascist mass were precisely obedience, unity of spirit and the acceptance of natural hierarchies. These new masses were fundamentally different in their nature, their objectives and their behaviour from those of the nineteenth century, in the heyday of the popular movements.

The intellectual rejection of the mass society was the rejection of an exorbitant, outrageous pretension that had arisen since the French Revolution, of people demanding the right to self-government and equality. This was the beginning and the end of the matter: by undermining the foundations of democracy and trying to destroy the spirit of the Enlightenment, the cultural revolt, though it did not identify itself with Fascism, undoubtedly paved the way for it.

67 Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt* (above, note 47), p. 53.

PART I:

CULTURAL PESSIMISM —
FROM THE TURN OF THE CENTURY
TO THE 1930s

Lionel Gossman

The Sulking Corner of Europe: Burckhardt's Basel and the Critique of the Modern

Introduction

Basel had been a free and prosperous imperial city for several centuries when, belatedly and reluctantly, in 1501, it joined the ten loosely-associated cities and lands then making up the Helvetic Confederation. In doing so, it entered a defensive alliance but gave up very little of its sovereignty. Even after a new Swiss Federal Constitution was passed in 1848 — and accepted with resignation by the city's leaders (Basel's enthusiasm for the Confederation has been about equal to that of the United Kingdom for the EEC) — the small city-state continued to enjoy considerable autonomy. Not until the passage of a major revision of the Constitution in 1874 was it finally reduced, as one disgruntled *Ratsherr* (or senator) complained, to a mere municipality.[1]

Basel's Golden Age was the sixteenth century, when it was one of the great centres of Northern humanism and book publishing, the home of Holbein, Reuchlin and Erasmus. At the very point of its political extinction, however, the anachronistic old city was graced with a remarkable Silver Age. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it once again played host to a notable group of European intellectuals, who together undertook a far-reaching critique of what one of them described as the 'great optimist-rationalist-utilitarian ... prejudices of our democratic age.'[2]

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1   See W. Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt: Eine Biographie*, Basel 1947–1977, VII, p. 124. In the 1870s, citizens made up only 30% of the population of Basel. Swiss from other cantons made up 40%, and the remaining 30% were resident foreigners, chiefly Germans from neighbouring Baden and Wurttemberg.
2   F. Nietzsche,'A Critical Backward Glance' (1886), first published in *Ecce Homo*; reproduced in *The Birth of Tragedy*, English transl. by Francis Golffing, New York 1956 (henceforth, *BT*), p. 9.

The oldest of the group's four members, Johann Jacob Bachofen (1815–1887), was the eldest son of one of the wealthiest merchant families in the city. Bachofen resigned a professorship of law at the University after the local radicals made a scandal about his appointment. He gave up a seat on the republic's Great Council or Senate, left the running of the highly successful family business to his two younger brothers, and spent the rest of his life, from 1843 until 1887, as a private scholar and semi-recluse, dedicated to the study of ancient religion and law. He denounced the German philological establishment and its already world-renowned leader, Theodor Mommsen, for having propagated a sanitized version of classical antiquity adapted to the ideas and values of modern European society, and for having turned the study of the past from a personal vocation into a professional career. Ostracized for his apostasy, he nevertheless won recognition as a pioneer of modern anthropology because of his own wide-ranging comparative approach to the study of ancient cultures.

Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) belonged to an even more distinguished family than Bachofen, though he was born into one of its less well-to-do branches. Between 1630 and 1875 the Burckhardts provided almost a third of the Bürgermeisters (heads of state) of Basel, and Jacob's own father was chief minister at the Cathedral. He himself, after teaching for several years at the new Federal Polytechnic in Zurich, returned in 1858 to a position at the University of Basel, where he remained until his death. Burckhardt rejected the historical optimism of Ranke and Droysen, his teachers at the University of Berlin in the 1830s. As a consequence, he turned from the study of political history to cultural and art history, and challenged the generally held liberal assumption of a close relation between the flowering of culture and political democracy.

The other two critics in the group, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1906) and Franz Camille Overbeck (1837–1905), were younger men brought from Germany by the Basel Department of Education to fill chairs in classical philology and theology, respectively, at the University. They arrived within a year of each other, in 1869 and 1870, and were housemates until Overbeck moved out to get married in 1875. They remained fast friends until Nietzsche's death.

It is probably not coincidental that the two most prominent German scholars at the University of Basel were both opposed to the liberal, optimistic culture of the modern age. Not only was Basel a political anachronism in the age of the nation-state, but its ancient university, which had been brought under direct city supervision in 1817, was

closely associated with the city's ruling elite, and largely controlled by it. The local radicals spoke contemptuously of the professors as 'lackeys of the *Herren*.'[3]

However, the University of Basel was not a flourishing institution in the nineteenth century. Though it had for centuries been the only university in German-speaking Switzerland, it was one of the smallest in any of the German lands, smaller even than those of Greifswald or Rostock. In 1844, Burckhardt told a German friend that as there were 28 students enrolled in all, one had to be prepared to lecture to a class of one — a single student at Basel being the equivalent, as he put it, of seventy at Berlin.[4] Its traditional clientele was being wooed away by new foundations in liberal Zurich and Bern. The Federal Polytechnic (the present ETH) — the only new institution of the national university project to become a reality — was located, characteristically, not in eccentric Basel but in more central Zurich. Moreover, the 1833 division of the Canton of Basel into two half-cantons, following a protracted conflict between the city and its rural dependencies, had depleted the city treasury. Lacking the resources to attract established celebrities, the Basel authorities adopted a deliberate strategy of seeking out younger, promising scholars, who might benefit the university and the city for at least a few years until they were lured away to larger and wealthier institutions in Germany.[5] Those who were eager to be part of the mainstream academic culture of Wilhelminian Germany did leave — Dilthey, for instance, and Kiessling, and Jhering. Those who stayed on were often the quirky ones who were alienated, for one reason or another, from the dominant opinions and scholarly currents of their time. They found Basel, if not fully congenial, at least more tolerable and tolerant than the institutions of the new German Reich.

With his 1873 polemic, *The Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology*, Overbeck burned his boats and excluded himself from consideration at any major German university. Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), also provoked an overwhelmingly negative response from the academic establishment in Germany. 'It is as if I had committed a

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3 *Schweizerische National-Zeitung*, 16 January 1844.
4 Letter to Carl Fresenius, 20 January 1844, in *Briefe*, ed. M. Burckhardt, Basel 1949–1986, II, p. 74. Burckhardt's figure is exaggeratedly low. The true figure for enrollments in the period 1835–1845 is closer to 40; see Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* (above, note 1), II, p. 332, and A. Teichmann, *Die Universität Basel in den fünfzig Jahren seit ihrer Reorganisation im Jahre 1835*, Basel 1885, pp. 62–63. Still, as late as 1870, Nietzsche lectured to eight students and was advised by the locals that he had a very good enrollment.
5 C.P. Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Biographie*, Munich–Vienna 1978–1979, I, pp. 284–285.

crime,' Nietzsche himself remarked.[6] As a result, the only offer he received during the ten years of his tenure at Basel was from tiny Greifswald, and that came early in 1872, before people had had time to read his book or its reviews. Nietzsche complained about Basel and often thought of leaving it, but not for another academic post. In the end, only his illness drove him away.

It is quite likely, in fact, that extended residence in Basel had its effect upon the immigrants. Treitschke accused Overbeck and Nietzsche of having lost contact with the living spirit of the new Germany through overlong residence in the eccentrically situated former Imperial city, which he contemptuously described as their 'sulking corner' (*Schmollwinkel*).[7] Nietzsche's later claim to be a European rather than a German may well have derived in some measure from the years he spent in Basel.[8] As for the locals, Bachofen had been blackballed by the Prussian-led classical establishment and in any case refused, after the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, to set foot among the people he referred to as a *Räubervolk*.[9] Burckhardt, for his part, turned down an invitation to succeed Ranke in the most prestigious chair of history in Germany, and perhaps in the world, at the University of Berlin. His return to Basel in 1858 was apparently a deliberate decision against participating in the academic culture of his time. Like Bachofen and Nietzsche, he regarded it as corrupted by the values of the market and by what they all characterized as the culture of 'journalism' — that is, of the changing moment.

Basel

The young Friedrich Engels, travelling through Switzerland to Italy in 1841, did not have a good impression of Basel. It was 'a barren town, full of frock coats, cocked hats, philistines and patricians and methodists. ... A hole-in-the-corner town, with all the ugliness of the Middle Ages and none of their beauty.' As soon as he crossed into Switzerland proper, he felt relieved. 'The countenance becomes freer, more open, more vivacious, the cocked hat gives way to the round hat, ... the long,

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6 Letter to Erwin Rohde, 25 October 1872. For a good overview of the reception given *The Birth of Tragedy*, see R.F. Krummel, *Nietzsche und der deutsche Geist*, Berlin–New York 1974, I, pp. 1–16.

7 H. von Treitschke, *Briefe*, ed. M. Cornelius, Leipzig 1914–1920, III, p. 375, letter of 28 October 1873.

8 See Janz, *Nietzsche* (above, note 5), I, p. 279.

9 J.J. Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke*, X (Correspondence), ed. Fritz Husner, Basel–Stuttgart 1967, p. 376, letter no. 225 (end of September 1866).

trailing coat-tails to the short velvet jacket.' Zurich lifted his spirits completely. 'I saw the lake lying before me, glistening in the morning sun, steaming with early mist ... and I was overcome by ... astonishment at the existence of such a strikingly beautiful landscape.'[10]

Still confined within its fourteenth-century walls, Basel in 1841 did indeed retain the medieval outline that struck Engels so unfavourably. The baroque palaces of the wealthy merchants had been fitted into the existing town plan. Many humbler dwellings had acquired new windows or doors in rococo or Biedermeier style — signs of the owners' prosperity, like the fresh facades of Verrières in *The Red and the Black* — but there had been no alteration to the ancient shape of the city. Even the two principal open spaces — the Münsterplatz before the Cathedral and the Petersplatz before St. Peter's Church to the northwest — dated from the Middle Ages. In this city-state, ruled since 1521 by its merchants and artisans, there had been no ambitious or enlightened prince or monarch to initiate urban projects of the kind that graced cities like Strasbourg, Nancy or Mannheim. Since the Middle Ages, Basel had been a city of guilds, and like other similar places — Nuremberg, Augsburg, Frankfurt — it retained that character.

Nevertheless, Engels's gloomy account of the city and his glowing description of Zurich were almost certainly coloured by politics. Even after a conservative populist revolt overturned the liberal regime that had come to power in 1830, Zurich remained the centre of progressive politics in German-speaking Switzerland. In fact, the liberals staged a come-back within a few years of Engels's visit. To most observers it seemed an open place, confident, dynamic, with its face turned toward the future. Characteristically, the city walls had been torn down in the 1830s. Basel, on the other hand, though it was larger and wealthier, had become a byword for political conservatism and religious orthodoxy, the only important Swiss city not to have gone over to the liberals in 1830 — as Engels was certainly aware.

The city was controlled by an oligarchy of about thirty or forty merchant families, many of whom had immigrated to the city from France, Italy, or the Spanish Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to escape religious persecution or the disorders of war. Bringing with them capital and know-how, these newcomers had quickly gained control of the traditional artisans' guilds which formed the basis of political life in the old free city. The guilds elected

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10 'Wanderings in Lombardy' (1841), in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, New York 1976, II, pp. 170–171.

representatives from their members to the *Grosser Rat* or Senate, and from the latter to the *Kleiner Rat* or Executive Council. The elite families dominated the city's economy and society through their banking, money-lending and trading activities, and especially through their control of the manufacture of silk ribbon and passmenterie, which had become the principal industrial product in Basel and the surrounding countryside by the end of the seventeenth century.

This merchant elite — the *Herren* (Gentlemen), as they were called — gave themselves patrician airs, but they were feisty, shrewd, enterprising businessmen. They were not untouched by the ideas of the Enlightenment, many of which corresponded to their own practices and ambitions. Sons of the leading business and banking families of Basel, such as Isaac Iselin, were in the forefront of the Enlightenment in Switzerland. Others, like Peter Ochs, supported the French Revolution and were active in the administration of the Helvetic Republic (1798–1803). But in Basel as elsewhere, the 'excesses' of the Revolution raised fears about popular government, and the trade policies of Napoleon ran directly counter to the interests of the elite. At the time of the Restoration (1814), the Ochs family found it politic to change their name to His. Orthodox Calvinism revived in the upper class, Pietism among the artisans. The merchants and manufacturers regained political control. The surrounding rural territories, which were somewhat more populous than the city itself, lost the substantial representation in the Senate which they had obtained at the time of the Helvetic Republic. The citizens, mostly artisans dependent on the merchants for their economic existence, reverted to their normal condition of powerless deference. Theoretically, the government of the city-state was in the hands of the guilds. In fact, the *Honoratiorenregiment* — which made government service an obligation of citizenship and therefore unremunerated — ensured that only those with substantial means could afford to take part in government.

In Basel, the 1830 Revolution took the form of an uprising in the dependent rural territories, which demanded that their equal representation with the city in the Senate be restored. After three years of violent civil disorders, the city accepted a Federally mediated division of the canton into the two half-cantons that still exist today, Basel-City and Basel-Country. This was deemed preferable to relinquishing political control to the representatives of the countryside. At a time when liberal regimes were being set up and city walls torn down everywhere else, the walls of Basel had proved unexpectedly useful in protecting the townsfolk from armies of rural rebels. They thus

came to symbolize the city-state's anachronistic but jealously guarded political autonomy, its resistance to liberal-inspired movements for a stronger and more centralized Swiss Confederation, and, above all, the political dominance of the merchant elite. Engels's portrait of an enclosed, airless town certainly reflected the material reality of Basel in the 1840s, but it also represented a political and cultural judgement.

Yet the walls of Basel did come down, in 1859, the year after Burckhardt returned from Zurich to his native city to occupy the chair of history at the University. And it was the most energetic and enterprising part of the elite that promoted their destruction, as well as the enormous real estate boom that followed. It was also the elite, in unusual agreement with the radicals, that had supported the entry of the new railroad from Strasbourg a year or two after Engels's visit, despite the fears of old-time conservatives. Artisans, Pietists, and small traders, the opponents of the iron horse, saw it as an emissary of modernity, a conveyor not only of foreign goods which would compete with those of the local artisans, but also of foreign ideas and foreign (i.e., French and Catholic) morals. In deference to these fears, a large gate, especially constructed over the railroad line at its point of entry into the city, was closed each evening after the last train had passed through.

Unlike the artisans, the members of the elite, with their far-flung international trading connections, were neither timid nor parochial. Their conservative politics had nothing to do with the defence of traditional landed interests, as was the case in most European countries. On the contrary, the political *status quo* they aimed to preserve was one in which commercial interests predominated. Where these were not directly threatened, the *Herren* were flexible. Twice, in 1846 and again in 1857, they pre-empted demands for constitutional reform by themselves proposing limited revisions to the constitution.[11] Strikingly, however, the elite's intellectuals did not admire the pragmatism and willingness to compromise that were second nature to the businessmen. On the contrary, they opposed every concession of power and authority.[12]

With the hindsight of mature scholars, both Bachofen and Burckhardt identified 1830 as the great turning point at which the rot of Europe,

11 P. Burckhardt, *Geschichte der Stadt Basel von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, Basel 1957², pp. 245–247, 279–280.

12 See for instance J.J. Bachofen, 'Die Verfassungsrevision von Basel,' in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Karl Meuli, Basel–Stuttgart 1943–1967, I, pp. 436–439 (originally printed in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 October 1857).

as they saw it, became demonstrably unstoppable. This was the year of the triumph of liberalism almost everywhere else in Switzerland and, in Basel, of the civil war between the city and the country (the so-called *Basler Wirren*). In the 1830s, however, both had been restless, even rebellious young men, quick to denounce the old regime of their fathers as petty and narrow and to press for reforms. Burckhardt's close friendship in his student years, in the early 1840s, with the future radical socialist Gottfried Kinkel was not an aberration. Only in 1846, when bands of vigilantes, the *Freischaren*, marched out of the liberal cantons to topple the elected government of the conservative, Catholic canton of Lucerne, did Bachofen and Burckhardt undergo a political sea-change and became avowed antiliberals.

The perspective from which Bachofen and Burckhardt later criticized the modern world should not, therefore, be identified simply as a straightforward conservative critique. They turned against the regimes of liberal democracy, which they saw as the harbingers of socialism, but they were in no way intellectually committed to the world of their fathers. They themselves had rejected the old social and political order as narrow and deficient, and they had fled it repeatedly, to Germany, to Italy and even to Zurich, where Burckhardt accepted a post as Professor of Art History at the newly opened Federal Polytechnic in 1855.[13] At best, perhaps, one could say that they disliked the modern Basel of railways and factories even more than they despised the old Biedermeier Basel of their youth, and that they hated the new Berlin of the *Gründerzeit* — the epitome, for them, of the modern imperial megalopolis — even more than they disliked modern Basel.

13 On Bachofen and Basel — 'Basilea terra aspera et horrida,' as he called it, adapting Tacitus (*Gesammelte Werke*, X, letter no. 162, 10 June 1863) — see my *Orpheus Philologus: Bachofen versus Mommsen on the Study of Antiquity* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, LXXIII, Part 5, Philadelphia 1983), pp. 14–18. Burckhardt's relation to Basel is one of the themes that dominate his correspondence. In the early years, he complained constantly of the sterility, oppressiveness, and boredom of life in his native city. I shall quote only two examples. On 24 November 1843, he wrote to Kinkel: 'Basel will always be unbearable to me. I hope I need stay only two more years here: this between ourselves, for my so-called compatriots find that one ought to be perfectly happy to be here and I would arouse suspicion if I were to allow anything different to be rumoured' (*Briefe* [above, note 4], II, pp. 50–52). On 18 December 1852 he wrote that he had to get away from Basel, or he would go to pieces: 'You have no idea of the intellectual climate here. I can feel the best people here going rusty, literally, with my finger tips. I hope the new railway-Basel, that seems to be forming, will, in addition to some disadvantages, have the advantage of blowing the ruling clique here sky high. Their insularity embitters the lives of both natives and foreigners' (*Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, ed. and English transl. by Alexander Dru, London 1955, p. 112).

The Restoration in Basel had not been a return to the *status quo ante* in all respects. The country districts retained some representation in the Senate; public education was overhauled, modernized and brought under the direct supervision of the state; and the city-republic was one of the first states to introduce progressive taxation.[14] In the Europe of the Carlsbad decrees, the Basel government might even have appeared relatively liberal. Citizenship was severely restricted and not easy to acquire, but, in theory at least, government was completely vested in the citizens (exclusively male, of course), through the guilds to which they all were required to belong.

Moreover, Basel was a thorn, albeit not a very sharp one, in the side of Prussia and Austria, the chief reactionary powers on the continent. For example, the moderately liberal theologian De Wette was suspended from his teaching post at the prestigious new University of Berlin after expressing some sympathy for the motives behind the assassination of Kotzebue in 1817, and was promptly appointed by the Basel authorities to a chair at their own struggling institution. The University of Basel took in so many other refugees from political persecution in Germany that Prussia and Austria soon came to see the city-state as a nest of liberals and revolutionaries. In 1824, the King of Prussia even issued a decree prohibiting any Prussian subject from studying at the University of Basel — a purely symbolic gesture, since the University was then so insignificant that no Prussians had been tempted to enroll anyway. When Prussia and Austria pressured the city-state to turn over three of its most radical refugee professors, Wilhelm Snell, Wilhelm Wesselhoft, and Carl Follen (who later emigrated to America and became the first professor of German at Harvard), the Basel administration resisted and instructed them to remain at their posts. In the turbulent time following the assassination of Kotzebue, Basel appeared to some as a modern incarnation of the classical republic. This was in fact how the enthusiastic young neohumanist teachers whom the administration had imported from Germany saw it, and how they taught their students, among them Bachofen and Burckhardt, to imagine it. The ideals and enthusiasms of German neohumanism — the legacy of Winckelmann, Wolf, and Wilhelm von Humboldt — were dinned into both young Baslers by these teachers.

The neohumanists attacked the dominance of a Latin classical tradition which they associated not only with the rococo art and politics of the petty French-speaking courts of the old regime, but also with

14 Burckhardt, *Geschichte der Stadt Basel* (above, note 11), p. 213.

Roman and French imperialism. They advocated a return to the pure sources of Greek culture, associated with spontaneity and authenticity (or 'nature'), with the free and harmonious development of the human personality, and with the political form of the city-state. Their professed aim was the spiritual regeneration of the individual and, ultimately, of the entire German nation, through an internal appropriation of the spirit of antiquity as manifested above all in its language and literature. They claimed that there was a deep affinity between the German and the Greek language and spirit, both of which they considered authentic, 'organic,' 'poetic,' and creative, original and uncorrupted. The Latin spirit, by contrast, was parasitical and derivative in its reliance on academic tradition and intellectual analysis. Recovery of the authentic Greek spirit, as envisaged by the neohumanists, was thus nothing less than the discovery and birth of the authentic German spirit. The chief task of German culture in the nineteenth century was seen as the fusion of the Greek and the German, the Classical and the Christian or Romantic.

Overbeck and Nietzsche attacked the culture of their time mainly out of disgust for what they judged its spurious claims to have achieved such a fusion. The attackers themselves, however, remained marked by the early ideals of neohumanism. Overbeck's antipathy to theology had the same roots as Nietzsche's antipathy to academic philology. They denounced the imposition of an allegedly legalistic and rationalizing order on the most profound and original sources of human energy and creativity, the substitution of the letter for the spirit, prose for poetry, mediocrity for genius, the centralized *Grossstaat* for federations of small, independent states, and the values of the mass for those of the individual — in short, the substitution of death for life.[15]

In its early days, before it was appropriated and vulgarized by the ideologists of German nationalism, the neohumanist movement combined revolutionary potential with unworldly idealism in a mix that appealed to reformist milieux in Prussia, which advocated national regeneration and emancipation from the feudal-absolutist past, but at the same time rejected the policies of the French Revolution. It was equally appealing, however, to the oligarchic ruling class of Basel, which responded to neohumanism's glorification of civic republicanism and its emphasis on spiritual and cultural renewal, rather than social

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15 For a rapid overview of this kind of thinking in Germany, see G.L. Mosse's classic *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York, 1981[2], Chap. 7.

revolution.[16] Basel's relation to neohumanism was nonetheless slightly different from that of Prussia, and this was perfectly expressed in a unique Basel educational institution of which both Bachofen and Burckhardt were products.

In Germany, the Gymnasium educated students primarily with a view to professional training at one of the university faculties of law, medicine, theology or philology. In republican Basel, by contrast, the most gifted children of the elite were directed to careers not in the professions but in business and government. For example, Burckhardt's brother Lucas Gottlieb, whom his parents thought the most clever of their sons, went into his uncle's business and became technical director of his father-in-law's silk spinning mill, before retiring in his fifties to serve for another two decades as a *Ratsherr*. The idea was that the younger men would gradually take over business responsibilities from the older men, releasing the latter for the government and administrative service, which, in Basel, was the privilege and responsibility of the better-off citizens. The elite had no intention of handing these duties over to a specialized bureaucracy, as in the monarchical or princely German states. The young Basler, in short, required not a professional or pre-professional training but a general education appropriate to his future role as both a businessman and a leading citizen.

In 1817, as part of a general reform of education, the Basel government decided to replace the nine-year classical institution which was standard in Germany with a six-year Gymnasium, offering both a classical and a modern track, together with a unique three-year post-Gymnasium institution, known as the Pädagogium. More than a preparatory college for the university, the Pädagogium was designed to offer those who did not plan to go on to professional studies, the so-called *Nichtstudirende* (that is to say, the future businessmen and Ratsherren), an appropriate general and classical education. Its teachers were to be the best available — in other words, the faculty of the University. Nietzsche, for instance, taught six hours a week at the Pädagogium in addition to his duties at the University. Thus, the sons

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16 Carl Otfried Müller, one of the leading lights of the neohumanist movement in the 1820s and 1830s, did not disguise his contempt for political liberalism. 'If only the wretched half-knowledge and liberal way of reasoning had not taken hold of every one in Germany too,' he complained in a letter to C.V. Elvers in 1830. 'When I hear the philistines holding forth in the *Zivilklub* and I imagine these people taking part in elections and assemblies — God preserve our old governments. Constitutional wisdom seems to me a great folly' (*Aus dem ämtlichen und wissenschaftlichen Briefwechsel von Carl Otfried Müller*, ed. Otto Kern, Göttingen 1936, p. 130).

of the Basel businessmen learned Greek grammar and read Hesiod and Homer, Plato and Aeschylus with the future author of *Zarathustra*.[17]

At the same time, appropriately for an elite rooted in business rather than in land or ancient nobility, both the Pädagogium and the Gymnasium endeavoured to integrate the high spiritual ideals of German neohumanism with the practical goal of a modern scientific and technical education, as advocated by local Enlightenment thinkers like Iselin and Christoph Bernoulli. In the early years of the nineteenth century many of the elite families had enrolled their sons at Bernoulli's experimental *Polytechnion*, a school dedicated to mathematics and the natural sciences. Bernoulli agreed to close down his school in 1817 only on the understanding that the newly established Pädagogium would offer the future leaders of the city the option of a modern higher education, oriented toward modern subjects such as the sciences and foreign languages.

The Baslers

As students at the Pädagogium, Bachofen and Burckhardt were both enrolled in the classical section — although Bachofen's parents, significantly, had first placed him in the modern section. Their teachers were dedicated neohumanists hopeful that the ancient *polis* might be more successfully revived on the soil of the free city of Basel than in the Germany of the Carlsbad decrees, which many of them had been forced to leave for political reasons. These men criticized not only the narrow-minded suspicion of all learning found in Basel's influential Pietist circles but also the ideal of a practical, utilitarian, 'modern' education promoted by the radicals and supported by some members of the elite as well. Bachofen and Burckhardt were thus educated in the purest spirit of neohumanism. It was this spirit, in contrast to the more orthodox Enlightenment ideas underlying radical politics in England and France, that was the basis of their early criticism of Basel society. That criticism, from the outset, was essentially cultural and spiritual. In their letters of the 1830s and 1840s Bachofen and Burckhardt denounced the sectarian narrowness, the utilitarianism, the 'philistinism,' as they liked to call it, of Basel society, far more than its political repressiveness. These were idealistic young men in rebellion against the banality and pettiness of the way of life represented

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17 On Nietzsche's courses at the Pädagogium see Janz, *Nietzsche* (above, note 5), I, pp. 329, 342 and 351.

and defended by their 'purse-proud' fathers, as Burckhardt described them.[18]

Almost from the start, but with growing intensity as the years passed, Bachofen's scholarly work signalled his passionate resistance to his contemporaries' practice of reading ancient history in the light of what he called 'the pet ideas of the shallowest Prussian salon-liberalism.' Under Theodor Mommsen's baneful influence, he charged, academic philologists were looking at the culture of antiquity through the prism of a progressive, modernist ideology, which maintained the undemonstrated assumption that the modern 'scientific' perspective on antiquity was vastly superior to the benighted 'unscientific' understanding the ancients had had of themselves. As a result, modern scholarship had lost touch with what Bachofen saw as the very life of the ancient world, namely its foundation in myth and religion (a view taken up a few years later by his slightly younger French colleague Fustel de Coulanges). In Mommsen's phenomenally successful *Roman History*, Bachofen declared,

> [Everything] turns on imports and exports, the balance of trade, investment, competition, free ports, navigation acts, factories and emporia, as if that were the only point of view from which it is possible to consider and evaluate the lives of peoples. This 'practical point of view' is even carried over into religion; the Romans are admired for their 'clear rationalism,' law is considered from the perspective of real estate and personal credit, the elimination of customs barriers is seen as a triumph of liberalism.[19]

Bachofen's work on the classical world took an entirely different perspective, starting with his inaugural lecture at Basel on *Natural Law and Historical Law* (1841) and the fragments of the *History of the Romans* (1851), on which he collaborated with his teacher Gerlach, and continuing through his posthumously published *Journey to Greece*, the essays on the *Funerary Symbolism of the Ancients* (1859) and the pioneering *Mother-Right* (1861), the *Legend of Tanaquil* (1870), and the strikingly original *Antiquarian Letters* of 1880 (a study of the so-called 'avunculate' or relation of mother's brother to sister's children). It is an uninterrupted glorification of an early, almost prehistorical age of noble and heroic proportions, a life dedicated to larger and higher

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18 Burckhardt, *Briefe* (above, note 4), III, p. 36, letter no. 187 (11 September 1846), to Kinkel: 'Unter diesen Geldbrozen hält es kein rechter Mensch aus.'
19 *Gesammelte Werke*, X (above, note 9), p. 252, letter no. 143 (24 January 1862).

ends than material success or happiness. The great age of mankind, evoked in work after work, was a remote antiquity in which law, religion and culture were still one, and the individual found fulfillment not in himself but in the transcendence of self, in the community and the gods. It was an almost Edenic time when 'man walked hand in hand with the forces and all the phenomena of nature, ... and stood in friendly and respectful relation to the powers of the entire universe.'[20] Bachofen's Greece was the ancient Greece of myth and heroism, not the Athens of Socrates and the philosophers. The essential experience of his journey to Greece was a visit to the ruins of Mycenae, not the Parthenon.

In a description of one of the ancient sites in the Peloponnese, Bachofen directed a barb at the then-fashionable view that Homer was the name of a poetic tradition rather than an individual poet — the topic, later, of Nietzsche's inaugural lecture at Basel. Simultaneously, he was attacking the professionalization that, in his view, had delivered the study of antiquity into the hands of career-oriented academic pygmies, who could only peer blindly at its colossal outlines through the 'hyperborean mists' and the thick clouds of cigar-smoke filling their cave-like studies and senior common rooms. Implicitly, his target was modern radical criticism of large concentrations of wealth and property. For Bachofen, professionalization of historical studies and political radicalism were closely associated.

> The mighty building blocks of the gigantic old walls have often been broken down into a mass of smaller shaped stones in order to make them available for new projects. They proved too mighty for the small and puny race of men that now wanted to use them. Homer met with a similar fate. Gigantic figure that he was, he was too great for mortals as they now are, was therefore shorn of his individuality and dissolved into a collective idea which could be offered for sale in a quantity of small lots, like a great property after the owner has died, with the aim of putting it within reach of the feeble resources of poverty.[21]

Likewise, Bachofen's Italy was not that of Mommsen's highly successful *Roman History*: it was an 'Italia ieratica e sacerdotale,' as he put it,[22] an Italy even more ancient than the Roman Republic with which

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20 *Johann Jakob Bachofens Griechische Reise*, ed. G. Schmidt, Heidelberg 1927, pp. 54–55.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
22 *Gesammelte Werke*, X (above, note 9), p. 419, letter no. 257 (18 February 1869), quoting the Italian scholar Angelo Leosini.

the Baslers liked to compare their city, an archaic Italy, in which the Republic itself had been grounded. Quite early in his career he told a friend that 'the mighty realm of Alba [the supposed parent state of Rome], of which so low an opinion is held, and which is now regarded virtually as mythical and legendary, lay especially close to my heart.'[23] This, he declared, was 'the golden age of Italy.' There is little doubt that the timeless, historyless societies Bachofen evoked in his work stood in his imagination as an implicit condemnation of modern democratic societies (and in particular of modern industrial Basel). The latter were characterized by their rejection of any transcendental foundation, their artificially devised constitutions that were constantly being rewritten, their ever-growing proletariats of non-citizens, their ever-advancing rationalization of production processes and dehumanization of relations between master and worker, their preoccupation with the moment rather than with enduring values, their 'journalistic' culture, as all the Basel critics used to say.

In 1861, Bachofen published *Mother-Right*, his best-known work, in which he sang the praises of the supposed matriarchal societies of early times. That same year, his father, Johann Jacob Bachofen-Merian of the flourishing Bachofen silk ribbon company, also published a book: *Geschichte der Bandweberei in Basel* (The history of ribbon weaving in Basel). Was it coincidental that woman — the founder of culture and the first to give form to raw matter — appears in the work of the scholarly heir to the company above all as weaver, as Arachne the spider-woman? Or that weaving is presented as a religious symbol, a symbol of the natural (and sacred) process of sexual intercourse and procreation, and a symbol of divine providence, of man's fate?[24] Bachofen's essential message was that weaving is not merely an industrial process, intelligible in terms of technical and market considerations; it is part of a total and sacred world order, a *hier-archy* with which it is ruinous and sacrilegious to tamper.

However, as his comment on Homer has already suggested, the individual or hero (usually male) plays as essential a role in Bachofen's work as the communal (identified with the female). 'In all ages what was truly great was the work of individuals,' we are told.[25] Like a woman, the people prepares itself by a slow process of maturation to receive the spark which will awaken it to a higher spiritual life.

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23 *Ibid.*, X, p. 110, letter no. 65 (11 November 1850).
24 See 'Oknos der Seilflechter,' *Gesammelte Werke* (above, note 12), IV, pp. 362–368.
25 *Griechische Reise* (above, note 20), p. 111.

This awakening is accomplished by the hero, the genius, the great individual:

> The preparation of the soil may last untold millennia. The peaceful labor is like the silent uniform operation of all the forces of nature. The work goes forward in exactly the same way for thousands of years. A history [of Argos] begins only with the arrival of Danaos. It is he, the stranger from Egypt, who founds a ruling dynasty, builds up high Larissa as his royal fortress, and brings to the land the beginnings of culture and artificial irrigation.[26]

In the same way, no doubt, the ancestors of the elite, the enterprising foreigners who migrated to Basel in the early modern period, bringing with them capital and new skills, energized and reorganized the city's economy. In short, both workers and masters, both the artisans and the leading families — the heroic bourgeois of Basel — were an essential part of Bachofen's sacred economy. The message — the sacred character of the cooperation between an obedient *Volk* and its divinely appointed leaders — was one of which the Basel merchants and ribbon manufacturers, faced as they were in the 1860s with intense social and industrial unrest, were unlikely to have disapproved. When taken up again in the Germany of the 1920s and 1930s, however, that message was adapted to drastically different ends from those of the Basel elite in the 1860s.

Bachofen himself had no illusions about the possibility of any return, in the near or even the distant future, to conditions comparable either to those of the primitive communism of matriarchal societies or to those of the heroic age of Greece, and he viewed all efforts to force such a return (including socialism) as ultimately regressive, likely only to produce a new barbarism. He appears to have decided that there was nothing for him to do but stand firm in the world from which he felt estranged, doing his duty as far as possible, and refraining from participation in those aspects of social and political life that were repugnant to him. And so it was that he lived out his life in opulent obscurity in his handsome mansion in the heart of his native city, publishing his works in ridiculously limited or private editions: 'mi sono quasi sepolto nei sepolcri,' he once remarked.[27] For twenty odd

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 169. Similarly, there are stages in the history of weaving: the 'telluric' weaving of the 'Urmutter' Aphrodite is surpassed by the more refined production of Pallas Athene. See 'Oknos der Seilflechter,' in *Gesammelte Werke* (above, note 12), IV, pp. 362–368.

27 *Gesammelte Werke*, X (above, note 9), p. 391, letter no. 236 (5 November 1867).

years, until 1866, he faithfully served the republic of Basel, despite his deeply felt alienation from it, in the only acceptable way left to him, as an appeals court judge.[28]

Burckhardt was no more inclined to political activism than Bachofen, and, not unlike Bachofen, he solved the problem of remaining loyal to his native city, despite its 'ultrademocratic' direction, by resolving to 'stay at his post'[29] and dedicate himself to the university and to the audiences of citizens that attended his popular public lectures. 'Things will turn out as they will in Basel, but I shall be there,' he wrote to his friend von Preen in 1874, on the eve of the constitutional revision that finally snuffed out what remained of Basel's political autonomy.[30]

According to Burckhardt, there were 'no golden ages in the past or in the future.' To recognize this was to free oneself 'from foolish overvaluation of some period or other in the past, from equally foolish renunciation of the present, and from foolish hope in the future.' No one, in other words, may abdicate responsibility for making moral and political choices by adopting a pessimistic view of history as inevitably degenerative, or, alternatively, by blindly embracing an optimistic philosophy of history, in which historical success determines the rightness or otherwise of historical acts, events, and movements.[31] At the height of his disgust with the populist radicalism of Switzerland in the mid-1840s — 'I have the sovereignty of the people up to here!' he exclaimed in a letter to Kinkel around the time of the *Freischaren*[32] — Burckhardt did seem to propose the past as a form of evasion. He planned to escape to Italy, he wrote, 'to the beautiful, lazy South, where history is dead.'[33] But in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, the best-known of several works that resulted from his life-long

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28 Typical of Bachofen's attitude is his response in the mid-1860s to Bürgermeister Felix Sarasin's request for his opinion about a new civil code being drawn up for Basel. Since he was in profound disagreement with the whole project, he wrote, he could not give an opinion: 'Ich bin also genöthigt, bei dem Werke Ihrer Commission ... ein stummer Zuschauer zu bleiben, um späterhin mit Ergebung in das uns bereitete neue Schicksal der richterlichen Pflicht eingehender Prüfung des neuen codex legum mit um so grösserer Genauigkeit obzuliegen' (*Gesammelte Werke*, X [above, note 9], letter no. 216, 18 March 1866).

29 'Our circumstances here are moving toward an ultrademocratic turn. I have seen the thing coming for years and have long been ready for everything. ... What I have to do is simple: stay at the post which I have had several advantageous opportunities of leaving' (*Briefe* [above, note 4], V, p. 237, letter no. 640, 9 August 1874, to Kugler).

30 *Ibid.*, V, p. 225, letter no. 629 (31 May 1874).

31 *Historische Fragmente*, ed. E. Dürr, Stuttgart 1957, p. 3. Burckhardt adds: 'One can find in the contemplation of other times one of the noblest human occupations.'

32 *Briefe* (above, note 4), II, pp. 166–167, letter no. 146 (11 June 1845).

33 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 208–209, letter no. 174 (28 February 1846).

love of that country, he noted repeatedly that his aim in writing it had been to acquire and help his readers to acquire a better understanding of the culture to which they belonged, and which, in his view, had entered on a period of deep and probably irremediable crisis. He seems to have expected that such understanding would enhance the individual's ability to make independent judgements and to stand up, where necessary, for unpopular values or causes.

This was a far different conception of history from that of the majority of Burckhardt's contemporaries. In the words of Ranke, Burckhardt's teacher in Berlin, historical study above all meant establishing *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (what had actually happened), and writing the continuous narrative, to the degree that it was possible to decipher it, of God's providential plan for man. The lesson of history would come from perceiving and accommodating oneself to that plan. The subject must be subordinated to the objective order of history as historical 'science' had established it. Burckhardt's history was a complete repudiation of this historical 'science' or *Wissenschaft.* 'We are not privy to the purposes of eternal wisdom,' he declared. 'They are beyond our ken. Rash anticipation of a world plan leads to errors, because it starts from false assumptions.'[34]

The study of history does not reveal an objective order to which the individual is obliged to submit; on the contrary, it should aim to enrich the understanding and refine the consciousness of the subject. In place of the judgement *of* history — the idea, shared by nearly all the Berlin academics, Ranke no less than Hegel and Droysen, that historical success is the ultimate indicator of value — Burckhardt reasserts the legitimacy and necessity of man's judgement *upon* history. This vision of history was clearly not for professionals, bureaucrats or obedient subjects (and it is surely not irrelevant to note that virtually all professional historians and philologists in continental Europe were state employees). It was for free citizens, men of independent mind and means — genuine individuals, Burckhardt would have said — such as the *Nichtstudirende,* future businessmen like his brother Lucas, about whose education the Basel government had been so concerned. In the preface to his first major work, *The Age of Constantine the Great* (1853), Burckhardt declared that he wrote 'not primarily for scholars but for thoughtful readers from all sectors of society.'[35] It should

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34 *Reflections on History,* English transl. by M.D.H., London 1943, p. 16.
35 He issued a similar warning statement regarding his teaching of art history: 'I do not lecture for art historians' (quoted by Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* [above, note 1], II, p. 505).

not surprise us that the locus, outside history, from which a judgement upon history could be pronounced was not modern Berlin, the centrally situated capital of the new Bismarckian German state, but eccentric, anachronistic Basel, in its *Dreiländerecke*, where three European nations come together.

In keeping with Burckhardt's understanding of man's relation to history, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* celebrates the culture of individualism and, in particular, the creative and heroic moment that both inaugurates and puts its stamp on that culture. The emphasis throughout Burckhardt's work is on the act of emancipation, the spirit of adventure, the decision 'to make a leap into the air,' as Overbeck was later to put it; these, for him, were the characteristics of genuine modern individualism. What counted, in other words, was not so much the individual as a subject of rights, the moral and legal subject of English and French liberal philosophies, but the individual as the author of free and creative acts and judgements, the individual as artist or entrepreneur. 'Personality,' Burckhardt wrote, 'is the highest thing that there is.'[36]

Burckhardt, like Bachofen, was troubled by the alleged erosion of the free and distinctive personality by the ever more centralized and powerful state, by the demands and pressures of the market, by universal education and its accompaniments — a commercialized literature and art and the penny newspaper press — by the culture of the modern *Grossstadt* or megalopolis, which was a concern of writers as varied as Tocqueville, Flaubert, and Alexander Herzen. 'There has never been such a vulgar, unattractive period in the history of the world as that since 1830,' Burckhardt wrote.[37] The thousands of young men, 'volcanoes of originality and poetry,' as he put it, who had crowded the lecture halls of Berlin in his student days, had been turned into 'servile or liberal philistines.' He added: 'It is a long story, the spread of culture and the decrease of originality and individuality, of will and capacity; and the world will suffocate and decay one day in the dung of its own philistinism.'[38]

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36 Quoted by J.H. Nichols, in his Preface to J. Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom: Reflections on History*, New York 1943, p. 17.

37 *Briefe* (above, note 4), III, p. 55, letter no. 193 (27 February 1847).

38 *Ibid.*, III, p. 60, letter no. 194 (22 March 1847). Almost a half-century later, in 1891, Burckhardt noted that although there were many intelligent and sensitive people around, 'with the exception of an occasional and often fanatical little circle of supporters, nobody really enjoys individual works any more' (*Ibid.*, IX, p. 299, letter no. 1349, 8 May 1891). The baneful influence of the market and the newspaper feuilleton on literature had been the theme of several reports he wrote from Paris for

Burckhardt reached the point where he opposed one of the most basic of liberal policies: popular education. A projected expenditure of two million francs on new school buildings in Basel provoked an outburst from him against 'free instruction, compulsory instruction, a maximum of thirty per class, a minimum of so and so many cubic metres per child.'[39] It was not the expenditure of taxpayers' money that bothered him; it was the whole idea of state-controlled, universal, democratic education, which, like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, he saw as producing, multiplying and empowering mediocrity. It also signalled the growth of state power at the expense of individual freedom. 'The real ethos of the times,' he declared, is 'a flight from the risks of business into the arms of the salary-paying state.' In contrast to ancient man, modern man was incapable of glorious action and self-sacrifice. He would always seek 'to avoid the worst.'[40]

Burckhardt was convinced that the world of individual initiative and autonomy which he admired, and which he evoked in his portrait of the Italian Renaissance, was doomed by the very forces it had set in motion. Anticipating Weber, he believed that the scale of modern capitalism

the *Basler Zeitung* in the 1840s. The commercialization of literature, he warned, had already gone far in France. In the old regime, there had been no literary industry ('keine literarische Industrie,' *Historische Fragmente* [above, note 31], p. 211). But in the 1840s, Eugene Sue and Alexandre Dumas were signing lucrative contracts with their publishers, and even Chateaubriand, who had originally wanted his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* to appear only after his death, had agreed to let them be published in installments in the newspapers for a cash payment of 80,000 francs and an annual lifetime pension of 4,000 francs. As smaller publishers went out of business or gave up publishing literature, Burckhardt predicted, the giant houses would increasingly dictate what writers were to produce. Literature itself would divide into two opposing types: a market-oriented literature and a marginal Bohemian literature indifferent to and even contemptuous of the public (Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* [above, note 1], II, pp. 432–435). To his friend von Preen, who had commented on the absence of great individuals in the productions of modern culture, Burckhardt replied that only a radical impoverishment of society, a return to simpler ways, and a decline in the influence of the *Grossstadt* and its press would make it possible to ascertain whether any 'fresh and great, authentic energies' had escaped the general corruption (*Letters of Jacob Burckhardt* [above, note 13], p. 229, 26 December 1892).

39 *Ibid.*, p. 208 (13 April 1887).
40 *Ibid.; Historische Fragmente* (above, note 31), p. 7. See also *ibid.*, p. 41, on the nature of human greatness, which Burckhardt associates with the power of self-sacrifice rather than with intellectual accomplishment, and p. 78, on the loss of heroic individuality, which, according to Burckhardt, had accompanied the rise of the modern, centralized *Macht-* and *Rechtstaat*. Man has gained 'as a private person, but as a citizen he is in full decline and, at times of danger, is becoming accustomed to call on some all-powerful arm of state.' On this topic see David Norbrook, 'Life and Death of Renaissance Man,' *Raritan*, Spring 1989, pp. 89–110.

required highly rationalized corporate structures rather than individual enterprise, imagination and resourcefulness. There was evidence for that conviction all around him. Private banking in the traditional Basel style, for instance, was already being displaced by the new joint-stock banks that were developing apace in Zurich. Since 1815, Burckhardt wrote, 'the industrialization of the world has proceeded apace. ... Machine production has far overtaken all older techniques of production; large amounts of capital have to be brought together to set up factories and large masses of men brought together to work them.'[41] The effect on culture had been disastrous. The Basel businessman, for instance, used to be an unusually well-educated person, an authentic individual with a genuine love of literature and learning as well as an acute practical sense of economic realities and the energy needed to exploit them — a type not unlike the Florentine merchant eulogized in *The Civilization of the Renaissance*.[42] Modern business conditions required such undivided attention, however, that no one had the time to read any more, or, increasingly, the inclination.[43]

Burckhardt himself, as is well known, refused to publish anything after 1860, so that his return to Basel from Zurich in 1858 was in every sense a withdrawal from the mass culture of the modern world, historically inevitable as it was. He made a conscious commitment to his own prescription for the concerned humanist in a time of crisis, which was to preserve his freedom and independence of judgement, abstain from fruitless political action, and devote himself instead to preserving genuine culture for the future. As he put it in a letter, he intended to 'debauch' himself with 'aristocratic culture, so that when the social revolution has exhausted itself, I shall be able to take an active part in the inevitable restoration.'[44]

Burckhardt's presentation of individuality is characteristically many-sided and difficult to pin down. Nietzsche interpreted his portraits of rapacious, competitive individualists, especially in *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, as a glorification of human dynamism and artistry

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41 *Historische Fragmente* (above, note 31), p. 267.
42 *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, English transl. by S.G.C. Middlemore, Introduction by Benjamin Nelson and Charles Trinkaus, New York 1958, I, p. 148.
43 Letter to von Preen, *Briefe* (above, note 4), V, p. 98, letter no. 546 (3 July 1870). See also Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* (above, note 1), VII, p. 135.
44 *Letters of Jacob Burckhardt* (above, note 13), p. 97 (28 February–5 March 1846). 'Out of the storm a new existence will arise, formed ... upon old and new foundations. Our destiny is to help build anew when the crisis is past.'

'beyond good and evil.'[45] Having attended his lectures in the winter of 1870–1871, Nietzche contended that Burckhardt toned them down with 'strange breaks and circumlocutions' only for reasons of prudence and deference to public opinion.[46] But Burckhardt's many cautionary and critical remarks in *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, to the effect that the condition of 'excessive individualism' which had created the greatness of the Italian character was also its fundamental vice, indicate that his reservations were more than mere timidity. The same impression is borne out in his portraits of artists and sages, such as Dante in *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, and Socrates and Diogenes in the *Greek Cultural History*. Moreover, in many passages of his correspondence, Burckhardt expresses his distaste for what he calls the 'daemonic.' 'If you truly believe you are a daemonic nature, I ask one thing of you,' he wrote to a young friend, 'and that is that you never, not for a single moment, find satisfaction in that fact.' It requires no effort to be negative and critical, he continued: 'Avoid it. It is easy to destroy, and very difficult to rebuild.'[47]

That was clearly the fundamental conviction that underlay Burckhardt's increasing coolness to Nietzsche. Toward the end of his life he rejected Nietzsche's reading of his own work: 'I for my part have never been an admirer of *Gewaltmenschen* and outlaws in history, and have on the contrary held them to be *Flagella Dei* (scourges of God) ... I really interested myself in the creative aspect of things, that which makes men happy, the vitalizing aspect.'[48]

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45 See Nichols, Preface to *Force and Freedom* (above, note 36), p. 21.
46 Quoted by Nichols, *ibid.*, p. 22.
47 Letter to Albert Brenner, a student with poetic ambitions at the University of Basel, from Zurich, 16 March 1856 (*Briefe* [above, note 4], III, pp. 247–249). Ten years earlier, reflecting on the suicide of a gifted fellow-student, he wrote: 'This comet which swept ... through our circle has thus burnt out before our eyes. But what a man! He was truly of divine race. ... I can't say that I really loved him, he was too violent for me from the beginning for that, too unrestrained by far. ... Taking it all in all, I say — God forgive me! — it is better not to be a genius and to have instead good, strong nerves and a strong conscience, which, when one has sinned, is cured and refreshed in hearty benevolence to others. That ... would be my ideal' (quoted in Nichols, *Force and Freedom* [above, note 36], p. 29).
48 Letter to Ludwig Pastor, 23 January 1896, quoted in O. Markwart, *Jacob Burckhardt: Persönlichkeit und Jugendjahre*, Basel 1920, p. 44; see also *Letters of Jacob Burckhardt* (above, note 13), p. 235. Also pertinent is Burckhardt's horror of Wagner, which drove a wedge between the two colleagues at the time of Nietzsche's infatuation with the prophet of Tribschen. Burckhardt loved Glück, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Italians, Rossini and Bellini. See on this Nichols, *Force and Freedom* (above, note 36), p. 23. Burckhardt also expressed scepticism about a rather dangerous idea to which he

The ambiguity in Burckhardt's cult of the individual and of individual energy seems to me strikingly appropriate to the society and class to which the historian belonged.[49] The Basel elite, as we have observed, was economically enterprising and aggressive. It had certainly lost ground to upstart Zurich in banking, the wealthy families having perhaps failed to appreciate the significance of the joint-stock bank for a modern economy, or — more probably — being unwilling to sacrifice the direct political influence that their exclusive control of capital had traditionally guaranteed them. But through their own resources they had successfully modernized their extensive ribbon manufacturing interests and ensured that Basel would retain its traditional role as a major European forwarding center. Moreover, the period after Burckhardt's return to Basel saw the beginnings of the chemical industry, which was destined to be the chief source of the city's prosperity in the twentieth century, and which was backed by the great families of the Geigys, the Hoffmanns and the La Roches. At the same time, however, the elite remained a politically conservative oligarchy.[50] The order it wished to preserve was neither purely traditional (rule by a hereditary class) nor purely meritocratic (rule by naturally selected leaders); it was a mixture of both. The Basel elite's claim to authority was based both on ability and on the experience and tradition of over three centuries. The magistrates could equally consider themselves self-made men and hereditary guardians. There was no question in Basel, as there was in Prussia, of having to replace an obsolete feudal or landed leadership with new supermen of energy, education and initiative. That peculiarity of the Basel elite may account both for Bachofen's dual allegiance to the hero and to the community and for the reservations with which Burckhardt surrounded his endorsement of individualism.

himself seems intermittently to have lent support: namely, that in the decadent state of European culture, an influx of healthy barbarism might be a desirable restorative. 'Not every invasion is a rejuvenation,' he warned, 'but only such as carry a youthful people capable of assuming culture into an older cultured people' (*Reflections on History* [above, note 34], p. 135; translation slightly modified).

49 As David Norbrook points out, '[Burckhardt's] Italy may be hierarchical, but it is also energetically meritocratic, a world of atomized individuals competing with one another on an equal basis without regard to any traditional constraints' (Norbrook, 'Life and Death' [above, note 40], p. 98).

50 That is why it is sometimes referred to as a 'patriciate.' However, this term is misleading. Unlike the Venetian patriciate, the Basel elite was not a closed caste. It was always open to the rich and successful. The intricate network uniting the members of the elite to each other through marriage was easily expandable.

The Basel Germans

Unlike Bachofen and Burckhardt, Franz Overbeck was a thorough cosmopolitan. He was born in St. Petersburg of a French Catholic mother and a German Lutheran father who held British citizenship. Raised in a society of exiles (his father worked for an English store in the Russian capital) and educated in Russia, France, and Germany, he was neither rich nor well connected. His prospects of finding academic employment in Germany were not bright when he received an invitation to join the theology faculty in Basel. Like many Germans in the same situation, he accepted the offer from a Swiss university, thinking that it would tide him over until something better turned up in Germany. In the event, he never returned to Germany and spent his entire career in Basel.

Overbeck was brought to Basel in response to local pressure on the university authorities to hire a professor who would represent the liberal school of thought influential in modern Protestant theology. He was a compromise candidate, the choice of the ruling elite, and from the outset only grudgingly accepted by the reformers. Barely three years after his arrival, he published a scathing critique of liberal theology. As in the case of Nietzsche's attack on David Strauss, however, the satisfaction of the local Pietists and orthodox Calvinists must have been tempered by the sobering thought that the divinity had made use of an apostate to smite His enemies. Overbeck's work was not only a rejection of liberal theology, it was a challenge to all theology and to the very possibility of reconciling authentic Christianity with authentic modernity. Shortly after the appearance of *The Christianity of our Present-Day Theology*, Overbeck announced publicly that he and his wife were no longer members of any church. It was generally understood at Basel that the new professor of theology was an atheist.

In his student days at Leipzig, under the influence of his close friend, the future nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke, Overbeck had strongly supported the cause of German unity under the leadership of Prussia. Newly arrived in Basel at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, he at first participated in efforts to mobilize support for the Prussian cause among Germans resident in Switzerland. However, like Nietzsche, who had arrived a year earlier, his enthusiasm rapidly turned to disillusion and finally to outright hostility toward the new German Empire as he reassessed the character of the war. He reached the conclusion that the effect of the Prussian victory would be a complete sell-out of German culture, and in particular of the universities

and the church, to the power of the state and the interests of the new economic moguls. *The Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology* accused German liberal theology of betraying Christianity by turning it into a state religion of the new imperial Germany. Overbeck was well aware that by publishing this work he had 'embroiled himself,' as he put it, 'in an unresolvable conflict with the dominant theological current in the German Empire and in consequence was condemned to exile.'[51]

In Overbeck's view, early Christianity was an eschatological religion founded on the prophetic premise of the imminent end of the world. In other words, it was not oriented toward a long historical existence, but was a religion of crisis and immediate and dramatic decision. No thought was given to codifying and institutionalizing the teaching of Christ, because there would be no future in the world and thus no need for any codification. A theology was elaborated only when it became necessary to account for the fact that the world was not coming to an end, at least not immediately, and to sustain the faith of the disciples in the face of that realization. The task of the early theologians was thus to facilitate the survival of religion and its accommodation to the changing world of history, to mediate between spontaneous religious experience, which is unconscious of history, and the historical world of philosophical reflection and of practical interests and politics. In Overbeck's own striking phrases, which bring to mind the Grand Inquisitor chapter in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1881), theology is 'the Satan of religion,' and theologians are 'traitors to the cause they are to defend,' 'panderers coupling Christianity and the world,' 'the Figaros of Christianity,' or 'old washerwomen drowning religion for us in the endlessly flowing stream of their chatter.'[52] Moreover, their commitment to the worldly survival of Christianity had made them 'craven worshipers of power in all its forms.'[53] All theologians, in Overbeck's pithy phrase, were Jesuits, in the sense that 'Jesuitism is Christianity that has become worldly wise.'[54]

In stark contrast to the project of 'modernizing' religion, Overbeck's project was to emphasize how far apart religion and modern secular

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51 *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie,* Leipzig 1903[2], reprinted Darmstadt 1981 (henceforth, *CHT*), p. 169 (Postscript to the second edition). The Empire which Germany had become since he left it in 1870, he explained, 'has been in a state of war with me since 1873.'

52 F. Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie,* ed. C.A. Bernoulli, Basel 1919 (henceforth, *CK*), pp. 13, 236, 273, 274 and 253 (in order of quotation).

53 *CK,* p. 242.

54 *CK,* p. 124.

culture are and to keep them apart. 'Those fruits are too high for you to reach,' he warned Treitschke, when the latter began his attempt to enroll religion in the service of his nationalist politics.[55] Correspondingly, he regarded with suspicion all efforts, such as those of David Strauss or Paul Lagarde, to found new religions. Lagarde's plan to introduce a new theology to be taught in the universities as the forerunner of a future 'German religion' seemed highly dubious to Overbeck. 'Theologies,' he noted drily, 'have always followed their religions. That a theology should precede a religion is unheard of, and it is scarcely to be expected that something like that could happen in the future.'[56]

Overbeck's critique of liberal Christianity did not, however, lead him into the camp of religious conservatism. With Pascal — the only theologian he respected, and, typically, an amateur — he believed that the 'simple' whose faith had not been shaken should be left alone. ¬For those who had been touched by worldliness and modernism, however, he advocated a dramatic leap into an undefined new condition — 'into the air,' in his own words — that would be genuinely of their own time and experience, a true *modernity* beyond the half-hearted compromise position represented by *modernism*.[57] In a striking comparison, he likened the situation of modern man to that of the original Christians, for whom there could be no going back but only a bold pressing forward on new and untrodden paths. 'Our defection from the old and our falling away from it are irreparable, as we learn from Hebrews 6:4–8. ... There is nothing for it: having come so far, we have no option but to press on further. ... If our falling away has truly extinguished all light for us, we can least expect to receive new illumination by turning back, and we may be sure that it can only lie ahead of us. We find ourselves faced with the same *adinaton* (impossibility) as the early Christians.'[58]

Overbeck was unmoved by the pleas and protests of former fellow-students who had embraced the new liberal theology.[59] He had no sympathy with attempts to shore up religion by turning it into an

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55 *Overbeckiana*, I (correspondence), ed. E. Staehelin and M. Gabathuler, Basel 1962, p. 119 (letter of 1 November 1875).

56 *CHT*, p. 129. Cf. Nietzsche's comment that 'It is the sure sign of the death of a religion when its mythic presuppositions become systematized,' in *BT*, Section 10, p. 68.

57 *CHT*, p. 77. For a brief account of Overbeck's distinction between 'modernity' and 'modernism' see my article, 'Antimodernism in Nineteenth Century Basel: Franz Overbeck's Antitheology and J.J. Bachofen's Antiphilology,' *Interpretation*, XVI (1989), pp. 370–373.

58 F. Overbeck, *Selbstbekenntnisse*, ed. E. Vischer, Basel 1941, p. 166.

59 See Gossman, 'Antimodernism' (above, note 57), p. 376.

ideological support of the state and the bourgeois social order. In a disenchanted world, the genuinely modern, free individual must learn to do without all such supports. 'Whoever stands truly and firmly on his own two feet in the world must have the courage to stand on nothing,' wrote the professor of theology and church history at the University of Basel. 'The thorough individualist must be able to do without God. ... Only without God can he live as a free individual. If he cannot bid farewell to God, either his individualism is not genuine or it has not yet developed to its fullest point of freedom.'[60]

The Nietzschean strain in these remarks is evident. The fortuitous encounter between Nietzsche and Overbeck in Basel had in fact led to an intense intellectual collaboration between the two men, especially in those early years. It is noteworthy, however, that though his admiration for Nietzsche never diminished, the more reserved and cautious Overbeck later had reservations both about Nietzsche's cultivation of aphorism as his preferred mode of expression and about the idea of the *Übermensch*, which, in his view, showed that Nietzsche had himself fallen victim to the 'Philistine' idealism he had spent his life combatting.

The works Nietzsche published at the beginning of the decade during which he occupied the chair of classical philology at Basel (1869–1879) are certainly less radical, original and complex than those that appeared toward the end of it or afterwards. Perhaps their more accessible style reflects not only an earlier stage in Nietzsche's development but also a degree of congruence between an author of unconventional views and a somewhat eccentric, independent-minded society that was ready to lend him a sympathetic ear. Nevertheless, these early writings lay out many of the central themes of Nietzsche's work. In particular, they set forth with great clarity his rejection of nineteenth-century liberalism, of modern democratic politics and education, of the growth of state power, and in general of the optimistic, rationalist, scientific culture inherited from the Enlightenment. For that reason, they were well received in Basel. Bachofen, Burckhardt, and the head of the Basel education department, Wilhelm Vischer-Biflinger — Nietzsche's predecessor in the chair of classical philology and the man chiefly responsible for bringing him to Basel — all expressed their pleasure at *The Birth of Tragedy*, while the five public lectures on education (*The Future of Our Educational Institutions*) drew and held an audience of more than 300 over several months. In Germany, in contrast, as is well

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60 *CK*, p. 286.

known, the philological establishment pronounced its anathema on *The Birth of Tragedy* through its spokesman Wilamowitz-Möllendorff — who was also to declare Burckhardt's posthumously published *Greek Cultural History* totally 'worthless for science.'[61]

Years later, in a section of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche himself defined the central argument of *The Birth of Tragedy*. It proposed, he wrote, 'in defiance of all the known prejudices of our democratic age — that the great optimist-rationalist-utilitarian victory, together with democracy, its political contemporary, was at bottom nothing other than a symptom of declining strength, approaching senility, somatic exhaustion — *it*, and not its opposite, pessimism.'[62] This thesis was articulated through a critique of the modern interpretation of antiquity.

Like Bachofen, whose books we know he borrowed from the Basel university library, Nietzsche claimed that the antiquity admired by contemporary classical philologists was a prettified version of the real thing, adapted to the needs and capacities of an 'enlightened' age that could no longer face the truth of life with honesty and courage, as the ancient Greeks had done. 'The Apollonian determinacy and lucidity' of Greek tragedy, 'the luminous images of the Sophoclean heroes' are 'the necessary productions of a deep look into the horror of nature, luminous spots, as it were, designed to cure an eye hurt by the ghastly night.'[63] The 'serenity' that resulted from the victorious struggle to give artistic shape to a terrifying vision of reality — 'an Apollonian culture blossoming over a somber abyss'[64] — is 'totally misinterpreted nowadays as a condition of undisturbed complacence,'[65] a 'counterfeit serenity' which — already in late antiquity — was 'in utter contrast to the naiveté of the older Greeks.'[66] It is 'the serenity of the slave, who has no difficult responsibilities, no high aims, and to whom nothing, past or future, is of greater value than the present.'[67]

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61 *Griechische Tragödien*, German transl. by U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, Berlin 1899, II, p. 7. The actual words, at the end of a short Foreword to Volume II, were that Burckhardt's book 'existiert nicht für die Wissenschaft.' For a discussion of this notorious judgement, see Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* (above, note 1), VII, p. 98.
62 'A Critical Backward Glance'(above, note 2), p. 9.
63 *BT*, pp. 59–60.
64 *BT*, p. 108.
65 *BT*, p. 60.
66 *BT*, p. 108.
67 *BT*, p. 72. It is hard to see, on the face of it, why the slave should be content with his present condition. Nietzsche is presumably referring metaphorically to the bourgeois, the 'satisfait,' as Overbeck used to say, who is enslaved by his material comforts, no longer capable of heroism or imagination, and unmoved by any self-transcending vision.

The essential contrast in *The Birth of Tragedy* is not between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian — these are inseparably linked, complementary, and rooted in the very origins of antiquity — but between both and the late-developing, 'decadent' Socratic spirit. 'The real antagonism,' in Nietzsche's own words, 'was to be between the Dionysiac spirit and the Socratic, and tragedy was to perish in the conflict.'[68] The essence of the new spirit is 'optimism which believes itself omnipotent,' confidence in reason and dialectics — the perception, as Nietzsche says contemptuously, of 'a triumph in every syllogism,' or 'the illusion that thought, guided by the thread of causation, might plumb the farthest abysses of being and even *correct* it.' This 'radically new prestige of knowledge and conscious intelligence' is 'the grand metaphysical illusion' that *The Birth of Tragedy* seeks to destroy, for it is the illusion in which the entire modern age is mired, without even the undoubted element of grandeur that attended its first appearance among the Greeks. 'Our whole modern world is caught in the net of Alexandrian culture and recognizes as its ideal the man of theory, equipped with the highest cognitive powers, working in the service of science, and whose archetype and progenitor is Socrates. All our pedagogic devices are oriented toward this ideal.'[69]

All the antinomies developed in Nietzsche's essay can be grouped around the two poles of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian on the one hand, and the Socratic on the other: heroic pessimism versus complacent optimism; life and nature versus ethics ('my vital instincts turned against ethics,' he would explain in *Ecce Homo*[70]); the artist versus the man of theory; reverence and awareness of the mystery of being versus 'a dubious enlightenment.'[71] Nietzsche stood for a critical and challenging sense of the transcendent — that is, of the past and the future, of the eternal and of difference — against a complacent, uncritical satisfaction with the present and the familiar; against ˉimprisonment in a narrow journalistic culture — 'the miserable rationalism and ephemerism of the American way of feeling,' as the celebrated neohumanist scholar Friedrich Welcker had called it as early as 1834.[72] In the end, Nietzsche's goal is to force a choice between art,

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68 *BT*, p. 77; see also pp. 88–89. These passages may well be the source of Roland Barthes's interesting speculations on the relation between tragedy and the domestic or bourgeois drama of the Enlightenment in his *Sur Racine*, Paris 1963.

69 *BT*, pp. 110, 88, 93, 83, 93, 109 (in order of quotation).

70 'A Critical Backward Glance' (above, note 2), p. 11.

71 *BT*, p. 82.

72 Letter of 13 December 1834, quoted in M. Hoffmann, *August Boeckh: Lebensbeschreibung und Auswahl aus seinem wissenschaftlichen Briefwechsel*, Leipzig 1901, p. 181.

poetry and imagination, which facilitate life, and 'asceticism, high intellect, duty,'[73] which alienate humanity from life and distract from its mystery; between 'the "I" dwelling truly and eternally in the ground of being' — and reached by 'a process of un-selving' — and 'that of the waking man,' the autonomous and, in Nietzsche's view, superficial self that was the goal and the ideal of Enlightenment.[74] Reality, according to Nietzsche, is the harshness of existence, the heroic character of choice, the necessity and permanence of crisis and tragedy, as opposed to the comforting belief 'that nature can be fathomed, ... knowledge [is] the true panacea ... and all moral and sentimental accomplishments — noble deeds, compassion, self-sacrifice, heroism ... — [are] ultimately derived from the dialectic of knowledge, and therefore teachable.'[75]

Nietzsche's essay is more than an attack on the 'optimist-rationalist-utilitarian' outlook of his time. It is a call — in line with the ideas of his friend Wagner — for a reawakened German spirit to take the lead in countering that outlook and in bringing about the 'rebirth of tragedy.' 'Socratic man has run his course; crown your heads with ivy, seize the thyrsus. ... Dare to lead the life of tragic man and you will be redeemed.'[76] In a passage that Bachofen must have read with the warmest sympathy, Nietzsche calls likewise for restoring myth to its proper place in culture: 'Only a horizon ringed about with myths can unify a culture. ... Nor does the commonwealth know any more potent law than that mythic foundation which guarantees its union with religion and its basis in mythic conceptions.'[77] In line with a prevailing opinion among German neohumanists, Nietzsche claimed that the German people was uniquely qualified to carry out this new Reformation. Though it might seem to have yielded, in 1871, 'to mediocrity, democracy and "modern ideas" — in the pompous guise ... of empire building,' it preserved 'underneath the hectic movements of our civilization ... a marvellous ancient power, which arouses itself mightily only at certain grand moments,' such as the Lutheran Reformation.[78]

Finally, by evoking the spectre of proletarian revolution as the inevitable outcome of liberalism, Nietzsche gave his exalted meditation on the meaning of tragedy and myth in ancient culture an immediacy

73 *BT*, p. 29.
74 *BT*, p. 39.
75 *BT*, p. 94.
76 *BT*, p. 124.
77 *BT*, p. 137.
78 *BT*, p. 138.

that was certainly not lost on his Basel readers. 'One thing should be remembered: Alexandrian culture requires a slave class for its continued existence, but in its optimism it denies the necessity for such a class; therefore it courts disaster once the effect of its nice slogans concerning the dignity of man and the dignity of labour have worn thin. Nothing can be more terrible than a barbaric slave class that has learned to view its existence as an injustice and prepares to avenge not only its own wrongs but those of all past generations.'[79] The pessimistic and tragic view of life has the obvious advantage, from the point of view of the ruling class, of providing no justification whatsoever for slaves to feel that they should be recognized as the equals of their masters.

The lectures on education were, if anything, more polemical than *The Birth of Tragedy*. The object of Nietzsche's attack is identified in the Introduction: the enlightened 'striving to achieve the greatest possible extension of education' and the inevitable consequence, 'a tendency to minimise and to weaken it' and to 'compel [it] to renounce its highest and most independent claims in order to subordinate itself to the service of the State.'[80] The concept of education advocated by Nietzsche, in contrast, is essentially that of German neohumanism as articulated by Wolf and Wilhelm von Humboldt and represented in Basel by the generation of young men who had immigrated to the city, at the time of the repressive Carlsbad decrees, to become the teachers of Bachofen and Burckhardt.[81] To the neohumanists, as we have seen, education meant above all the development, to the highest degree possible, of a free and creative spirit, and it was best achieved through study of the Greek language and literature. The critical, utopian character of early neohumanism remained essential to Nietzsche's view of education, and it underlies his repeated attacks on the state's subordination of the educational system to its own ends. In his last lecture, Nietzsche characteristically evokes the *Burschenschaften*, the student organizations of the Restoration period, and praises the 'most memorable of bloody acts, the murder of Kotzebue.'[82] Treitschke, the apologist of *Realpolitik*

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79 *BT*, p. 110.
80 *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions; Homer and Classical Philology*, English transl. by J.M. Kennedy, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, Edinburgh 1909–1911 (henceforth, *FEI*), III, p. 13.
81 See above, p. 44. On the neohumanist view of education as self-cultivation, see my 'Basel, Bachofen and the Critique of Modernity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XL (1984), p. 167 and note 115.
82 *FEI*, pp. 139–140.

and of the new Imperial Germany, was to mock both in his *German History in the Nineteenth Century* (1879).

Nietzsche emphasizes that the abandonment of the original neohumanist ideal is directly related to the rise of the modern state and of a modern industrial economy in Germany, especially since the founding of the Empire in 1871. In the rather backward Germany of his own student days, he has his narrator declare, 'the ... exploitation of youth by the State, for its own purposes — that is to say, so that it may rear useful officials as quickly as possible and guarantee their unconditional obedience to it by means of excessively severe examinations — had remained quite foreign to our education.'[83] With the passing of those simple times, the neohumanist ideal was threatened by three forces: the modern nation-state, modern political economy, and the ideology of the modern.

As the need of the state is for trained and loyal administrators or executors of its will, it cannot tolerate the critical perspective and the potential for deviance encouraged by a true classical education, a genuine immersion in the life of antiquity. The state will therefore promote 'the greatest possible expansion of education' only to the degree that it is confident that it can 'bring the most determined emancipation, resulting from culture, under its yoke.' It will support every extension of culture insofar as such extension is 'of service to its officials or soldiers, but in the main to itself, in its competition with other nations.'[84]

Modern economies likewise require a well-prepared, disciplined and unquestioning work force to carry out their functions, and that is 'the quarter in which the cry for the greatest possible expansion of education is most loudly raised.'[85] Nietzsche concedes — and the concession must have been welcomed by his audience of Basel businessmen and industrialists — that he has nothing against a practical education in modern subjects like the sciences and modern languages, such as is offered by the *Realschule*: 'For the great majority of men such a course of instruction is of the highest importance.' The *Realschule*, he acknowledges, performs honestly the task it professes. He even advocates admitting its graduates to the Universities.[86] It is the classical Gymnasium, which claims to promote culture or *Bildung* rather than provide a practical education, and to form men and leaders rather

83 *FEI*, p. 31.
84 *FEI*, p. 38.
85 *FEI*, p. 36.
86 *FEI*, pp. 95–97.

than efficient workers or cogs in a bureaucratic machine, that is the problem. Though the Gymnasium ought to be a constant challenge to the prevailing culture of the market and of modernity, it has opted to become their servant. Its students no longer expect it to help them develop their minds in freedom from all prejudice and constraint; instead, they hope it will provide them with a passport to material success and social preferment.

Moreover, the Gymnasium has taken over the methods of commerce and industry and applied them to its own central activity, the study of classical antiquity. 'A specialist in scholarship comes to resemble nothing so much as a factory workman who spends his whole life in turning one particular screw or handle on a certain instrument or machine, at which occupation he acquires the most consummate skill.'[87] Ultimately, his own modern methods and labours come to interest the scholar far more than the 'fallen statue of Greek antiquity,' which 'for centuries philologists have been trying, with ever-failing strength, to re-erect. ... Consciously or unconsciously, large numbers of [philologists] have concluded that it is hopeless and useless for them to come into direct contact with classical antiquity. ... This herd has turned with much greater zest to the science of language ... where the most mediocre gifts can be turned to account.'[88] The students of antiquity, in other words, now wish to forget their un-modern, un-comfortable vocation and to engage in a modern, comfort-bringing business like everybody else. The distinction between leaders and led, the elite and the mass, is being erased.

Finally, the ideology of the modern, which is associated both with the power and prestige of the state and with the power and influence of trade and industry, inculcates unbounded self-satisfaction at the achievements of modernity. It brings with it incapacity to acknowledge or entertain any interest in what is radically other and therefore challenging and potentially subversive, and willing submission to the mind-deadening, distracting culture of the ephemeral and immediate — the latest news, the latest fashion, whatever will facilitate 'flight from one's self' and the annihilation of genuine individuality.[89] Under this ideology, in Nietzsche's own words, 'the journalist, the servant of the moment, has stepped into the place of the genius, of the leader for

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87 *FEI,* p. 39 (translation slightly modified).
88 *FEI,* pp. 80–81.
89 *FEI,* p. 135.

all time, of the deliverer from the tyranny of the moment'[90] — that is, of the true man of culture.

The result of the enormous expansion of the education apparatus, together with the Gymnasium's abdication of its proper role, is the corruption of the sources from which true culture grows. Though true culture is always a matter for a small handful of people, it is important that a far larger number, 'led on by an alluring delusion,' seek it. Even if only a few are chosen, many must petition.[91] 'The rights of genius are being democratised in order that people may be relieved of the labour of acquiring culture ... What! ... Do you suppose you can reach at one bound what I ultimately had to win for myself only after long and determined struggles?'[92] One can easily understand that Nietzsche's audience of Basel 'patricians' responded favourably to a vision of meritocracy that corresponded so closely to what they perceived their own situation to be. As in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche denounced the corruption of contemporary German culture with special vehemence, because it is from the German spirit that one may hope for a revival of genuine culture — as opposed to the pseudo-culture of modern democratic and industrial societies on the English, French, or American model. As in traditional neohumanism, the German spirit is to 'join with the genius of Greece' to achieve this revival.[93] The final image evoked in these lectures is arresting, to say the least, and deeply, disturbingly ambiguous.

> Have you ever, at a musical rehearsal, looked at the strange, shrivelled-up, good-natured species of men who usually form the German orchestra? ... What noses and ears, what clumsy, *danse macabre* movements! Just imagine for a moment you were deaf. ... Undisturbed by the idealising effect of the sound, you could never see enough ... of this comical spectacle, this harmonious parody on the *homo sapiens*. Now ... assume that your musical sense has returned and that your ears are opened. Look at the honest conductor at the head of the orchestra performing his duties in a dull, spiritless fashion: you no longer think of the comical aspect of the whole scene, you listen — but it seems to

90 *FEI*, p. 41.
91 *BT*, p. 30. 'Here lies the whole secret of culture — namely, that an innumerable host of men struggle to achieve it and work hard to that end, ostensibly in their own interests, whereas at bottom it is only in order that it may be possible for the few to attain it' (*ibid.*). The achievement of culture is difficult and cannot be routinized.
92 *FEI*, p. 34.
93 *FEI*, pp. 67–68.

you that the spirit of tediousness spreads out from the honest conductor over all his companions. ... But set a genius — a real genius — in the midst of this crowd; and you instantly perceive something almost incredible. It is as if this genius, in his lightning transmigration, had entered into these mechanical, lifeless bodies, and as if only one demoniacal eye gleamed forth out of them all. ... You can divine from my simile what I would understand by a true educational institution, and why I am very far from recognizing one in the present type of university.[94]

A final remark. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the high tenor of the essay as a whole is interrupted by a sharp, thinly veiled warning of the perils of proletarian revolution. The lectures on education, too, contain a sardonic allusion to the danger to which universal education exposes the privileges of the liberal bourgeoisie: 'the great and awful danger that at some time or other the great masses may overleap the middle classes and spring headlong into this earthly bliss.'[95] As Nietzsche had put it in his notes for these lectures: 'universal education is the stage prior to communism ... the condition for communism.'[96]

It was no doubt a rhetorical ploy directed toward his audience of well-meaning Basel citizens, a traditional *captatio benevolentiae*, when the newly arrived young professor from Germany allowed in his opening remarks that the criticisms he was about to make of modern German education might not apply to his adopted city, 'which is striving to educate and enlighten its members on a scale so magnificently out of proportion to its size that it must put all larger cities to shame.'[97] But his audience — and even to some extent Nietzsche himself — could have taken this seriously. The Baslers, as we saw, liked to think their schools were distinctive, and in some measure they probably were. German academics, for instance, looked down on the study of the classics at Basel. It was judged old-fashioned and unprofessional, and was, indeed, directed more toward the general education of the *Nichtstudierende* than to the formation of future scholars. As the last refuge of the neohumanist ideals of the early years of the century, the conservative city-republic might well have had some grounds for thinking itself exempted from the sins of modern culture.

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94 *FEI*, pp. 141–142.
95 *FEI*, p. 37.
96 Janz, *Nietzsche* (above, note 5), I, p. 448.
97 *FEI*, p. 8; reiterated in first lecture, p. 16.

Yet the exemption Nietzsche allowed Basel remains ambiguous. For Nietzsche, as for Bachofen, Burckhardt, and Overbeck, Basel itself was ambiguous. It offered sanctuary from the modern world, certainly. At the same time, increasingly, it *was* the modern world. Where did Nietzsche think he was when he wrote to Erwin Rohde in 1872 that he was grateful to Basel 'because it has let me live in peace, as on a country estate,' while 'the sound of Berlin vocal organs, in contrast, is as hateful to me as the clanging of steam-driven machinery.'[98] In the very same year, Burckhardt was complaining that the railroad centre and mill town Basel had become 'gives you a feeling of emptiness and sadness,' punctuated by the 'ceaseless whistling and wailing' of steam locomotives.[99] It was only the formerly despised but now nostalgically remembered Biedermeier Basel of his youth that he might have been willing to describe as a peaceful 'country estate.'[100] Nietzsche was surely acknowledging an essential part of the truth when he observed bitterly to Overbeck that Basel had been 'the breeding ground of all my ills.'[101]

The Basel elite's interest in preserving their anachronistic polity and their own privileged position in it made them sympathetic to dissidents and heretics critical of the dominant modernist culture of the age and of democratic and nationalist ideologies. Consciously or unconsciously, they sought to justify and to strengthen their position through their control and support of the city's institutions of high culture. At the same time, however, these merchants and manufacturers remained practical and worldly men. As Bachofen complained, 'study for study's sake is something that is not understood by a people whose character is distinguished by practical concerns.'[102] As businessmen, they continued to regard profit as their top priority, and they had a remarkable capacity for the pragmatic compromises necessary for economic success. It was they who presided over the transformation of an essentially eighteenth-century merchant economy into the modern industrial one that ultimately undermined their political hegemony,

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98 Letter of 26 August 1872, in *Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Erwin Rohde*, ed. E. Förster-Nietzsche and F. Schöll, Berlin–Leipzig 1902, p. 348.

99 'Ein ewiges Pfeifen und Heulen,' *Briefe* (above, note 4), V, p. 154, letter no. 583, 17 March 1872.

100 See *ibid.*, pp. 148–149, letter no. 581 (to von Preen, 23 December 1871).

101 Letter to Overbeck, 3 May 1879, in F. Nietzsche, *Briefe*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Berlin–New York 1975, V, p. 402.

102 'Autobiography,' in *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, English transl. by R. Manheim, Princeton 1967, p. 9.

and that Burckhardt saw as the ruin of traditional bourgeois culture. When push came to shove, the Basel elite accepted the need to adapt to the world which they themselves had helped to bring into existence. The intellectuals they supported, on the other hand, rejected it, on principle, to the end.

At bottom, the intellectuals stood, or claimed to stand — somewhat dangerously, in my opinion — beyond politics, especially democratic politics, which they despised. 'We have here an opposition of sorts,' Burckhardt wrote Kinkel as early as 1843, when he was just twenty-five years old. 'But they are Philistines too, only of a somewhat different shade. As far as politics go, I have to keep my independence. I despise all parties, for I know them all and will not be caught up in any.'[103] Many years later, in the *Greek Cultural History*, he drew a portrait of Socrates which was also something of a self-portrait. In it, he quoted Socrates's words in the *Theaetetus*: 'At no time since their youth have philosophers known their way to the agora, nor do they know where the courthouse is, or the council chamber, or where the popular assembly is held. Neither do they hear or read the laws or care for the results of popular voting.'[104]

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103 Letter of 26 November 1843, *Briefe* (above, note 4), II, p. 52.
104 *History of Greek Culture*, English transl. by P. Hilty (from the abridged German version of 1958), New York 1963, p. 311. The passage from Plato is worded slightly differently in the Jowett translation of the Theaetetus; see *The Dialogues of Plato*, English transl. by B. Jowett, New York 1937, II, p. 176.

Robert S. Wistrich

Intellectuals and Mass Politics
in *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna

Fin-de-siècle Vienna was simultaneously the scene of one of the most seminal of the intellectual revolutions that ushered in the twentieth century, and a city that felt more acutely than most the stirrings of imminent social and political disintegration. Here, perhaps sooner than anywhere else, intellectuals had to confront the implications of the fragmentation of European high culture and the challenge of irrationalism, expressed in the rise of a new, more strident style of mass politics that threatened the very existence of the institutional and social order in which they lived. Part of the fascination which this period exerts upon us in retrospect is doubtless linked to the innovative responses which the Viennese intelligentsia developed in the face of this challenge;[1] but it also stems from our recognition, in the mood of pessimism, defensiveness and even powerlessness that gripped many of the Viennese intellectuals, of analogies with the confusion of our own time, the breakdown of old certainties, established

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1 On the socially constructive and innovative side of the Viennese intelligentsia, which has not been treated here for reasons of space and thematic coherence, see W.A. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind — An Intellectual and Social History 1848–1938*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1972. Johnston observes, *inter alia*, that Budapest intellectuals of the *fin-de-siècle* period were more involved in politics than their Viennese counterparts. Many Budapest-born intellectuals were Jews who later made their name in Vienna and elsewhere — one thinks of Adolf Fischof, Theodor Hertzka, Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau, Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim, among others.

It is interesting to note, however, that Austria also produced four of the most militant defenders of classical liberal thought in the twentieth century — Hayek, von Mises, Karl Popper and Joseph Schumpeter — all fierce critics of totalitarian collectivism, whether of the Left or of the Right. See J.-F. Revel's short article in *Encounter* (March 1985), pp. 42ff. On the socio-political background to the Austrian tradition of methodological individualism, see the instructive analysis of J. Torrance, 'The Emergence of Sociology in Austria 1885–1935,' *The European Journal of Sociology*, XVII (1976), pp. 185–219. *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna, it should be noted, was already the world capital of marginalist economics, founded on an introspective and interpretative psychology which emphatically rejected the collectivist view of society.

ideologies, traditional paradigms of social thought and received norms of behaviour.

In the following pages, I shall focus primarily on how the *fin-de-siècle* Austrian intellectuals related to politics in the wake of the crisis of liberal rationalism, which occurred earlier and more dramatically in Vienna than elsewhere in Western Europe. Here, the fragility of liberal modernity — bourgeois, capitalist, legalistic and rationalist — was exposed with a sharpness and at times a brutality that cast doubt upon its fundamental premises and presuppositions regarding the nature of the individual and his place in society. In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, it was essentially *political* frustrations, emerging from the crisis of liberal culture, which led to the discovery of that dangerous and mercurial creature, 'psychological man' — a creature motivated more by feeling and instinct than by abstract reason.[2] In the 1880s, with the rise of mass parties that would successfully challenge the liberal hegemony — Pan-Germans, Slavic nationalists, Social Democrats, and above all the antisemitic Christian Socialists led by Karl Lueger — the antiliberal tide seemed irresistible. By 1895 Vienna had been conquered by a mass movement from below, whose guiding principles — antisemitism, clericalism and municipal socialism — were the direct antithesis of classical liberal teachings. By the turn of the century, liberal parliamentary power at the national level in Austria had been broken decisively.[3]

This context favoured a reassessment of rationalist assumptions about human nature and the inevitability of progress, giving rise to the painful reorientation that underlay the sense of anxiety and impotence prevailing in the ranks of the *haute bourgeoisie* and in most of its leading intellectual representatives. The fact that this sector — and particularly the intelligentsia in Vienna — was predominantly 'Jewish' gave an added intensity and emotional charge to the cultural crisis, distinguishing it from similar tendencies visible elsewhere in *fin-de-siècle* Europe.[4] Antisemitism, after all, had been the primary vehicle for subverting the *status quo* in Viennese society, sweeping away its liberal foundations and calling into question the legal basis for Jewish emancipation. These ominous developments had coincided

2 C.E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna — Politics and Culture*, London 1980, p. 4.
3 For a description of this historical process see R.S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, Oxford 1989.
4 S. Beller, in *Vienna and the Jews 1867–1938 — A Cultural History* (Cambridge 1989, pp. 41–70), demonstrates with the aid of statistics that the educated classes in Vienna, especially in the liberal professions, were predominantly Jewish.

with the entry of the masses into the political arena. This explains why many Austrian intellectuals were tempted to regard the whole realm of politics as a sphere ruled by irrationality, a tendency that was all the greater within the Jewish element, so strongly represented among the Viennese intelligentsia and so directly threatened by the rise of political antisemitism. The popular success and resonance of the new illiberal and antiliberal mass politics of Lueger's movement generated a social and psychological pressure that inevitably affected the identity and self-perception of many Jewish intellectuals and artists. They did their best to flee its ravages — some into the temple of pure science, others into that of aestheticism for its own sake.[5]

There were those, like the assimilated Catholic poet of Jewish origin, Hugo von Hofmannstahl, who sought refuge in the Hapsburg imperial tradition. They attempted to resublimate politics into a ceremonial form that would canalize the irrational by accepting the primacy of instinct and refining it in a new cultural synthesis, based on older Austrian cosmopolitan values rooted in the Baroque.[6] Others, like the dramatist Arthur Schnitzler, embittered and disgusted by the irrationality and 'demonic' character of the political realm, tried to retain the sceptical individualism of the liberal heritage while abandoning its optimistic belief in reason and progress.[7] Karl Kraus, ever the supreme individualist, remained equally distrustful of all the new mass movements (including Social Democracy) while denouncing

5 On Viennese aestheticism and escapism from politics see C. Magris, *Il mito absburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna*, Turin 1963; Johnston, *The Austrian Mind* (above, note 1); and M. Pollak, *Vienne 1900*, Paris 1984.

6 See Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle* (above, note 2), p. 21; H. Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannstahl and his Time — The European Imagination 1860–1920*, Chicago 1984; and, recently, M.P. Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival — Austria as Theater and Ideology 1890–1938*, Ithaca–London 1990, p. 114. Steinberg describes how, during the First World War, Hofmannstahl sought to transcend what he called 'the concept of the mass, this frightful and dangerous concept,' by means of 'the higher concept of the Volk.' In the 1920s it was Hofmannstahl who coined the term 'conservative revolution,' with an eye to the renewal of an 'organic' Austro-German culture which could cleanse urban, secular modernity of its formlessness.
   Before the 1920s, however, Austria did not produce an indigenous, truly distinctive social theory of the Burkean type. The two most significant conservative ideologists of ninteenth-century Austria, Adam Müller and Karl Freiherr von Vogelsang, were both romantic Prussian conservatives who emigrated to Vienna in their later years. Vogelsang, a convert from Lutheranism, became the editor of *Das Vaterland* in Vienna and an apostle of neo-feudal, anticapitalist Catholic corporatism, the dominant ideology of Lueger's Christian Social party.

7 For Schnitzler's view of antisemitism see his powerful drama, *Professor Bernhardi* (1912), which also expresses a deep aversion to political militancy in general. See also R.S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna* (above, note 3), pp. 583ff.

the liberal cult of progress that had 'subordinated the purpose to the means of subsistence,' subjugating mankind to the rapacious market economy and the sensationalist press.[8] For Kraus, the image of Austrian liberalism was irrevocably associated with stock exchange profiteering and the capitalist oligarchy whose mouthpiece was *Die Neue Freie Presse*. An incomparable satirist, Kraus had once described *fin-de-siècle* Austria as 'a proving ground for world destruction' and deplored 'the destruction of the spirit' by that tragic triad, *Tinte, Technik und Tod* (ink, technology and death). He had no illusions about either capitalist democracy or the coming age of the masses, heralded by the slaughter of World War I and prefigured, so he believed, by a warmongering Austrian press.[9]

Freud had an even lower opinion of the masses, or more precisely the *Pöbel* (mob), as attested in his *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921), where it is characterized, *inter alia*, as impulsive, changeable, fickle, credulous, violent, driven by savage instincts and lacking the remotest critical faculty.[10] Quoting extensively from Gustave le Bon's 'deservedly famous' *Psychologie des Foules* (1895) — whose elitist, antidemocratic message would later influence both Mussolini and Hitler — the founder of psychoanalysis emphasized how little the masses were amenable to either reason or logic.[11] He unabashedly noted that Le Bon's depiction of the crowd 'fits so well with our psychology in the emphasis which it lays upon *unconscious* life;'[12] it was a 'brilliantly executed picture

8 On Kraus's critique of the 'aristodemoplutoburokratischen Mischmasch' of secular commercial civilization see E. Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist — Culture and Catastrophe in Hapsburg Austria*, New Haven 1986, p. 142.
9 *Ibid*. For Kraus, liberal democracy and 'progress' were merely a façade for the faceless culture of modernity, governed by anonymous economic forces, by demagogic political mediocrities and above all by the boundless cynicism of the mass-circulation press.
10 S. Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, Frankfurt a/M.–Hamburg 1967. All quotations are taken from the English translation in S. Freud, *Civilisation, Society and Religion*, London 1985, pp. 91–166.
11 *Ibid*., p. 109, from the section on 'Le Bon's Description of the Group Mind.' The English translation 'group mind' lacks the emotional resonance and pejorative associations of the German 'Massenpsychologie.' For the importance and impact of Le Bon see R.A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology — Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic*, London 1975, pp. 59–82, especially Chap. 7, 'Collective Psychology and the Democratic Tradition — An Ambiguous Heritage,' pp. 155–190. It is significant that France, the only secular, republican democracy in Europe at the time, should have been the birthplace of this new scientific discipline, followed closely by Italy. The reception of this literature in *fin-de-siècle* Central Europe remains to be studied in depth.
12 In the original German, Freud comments that the crowd 'will beherrscht und unterdrückt werden und ihren Herrn fürchten' (quoted in S. Heenen-Wolff, 'Wenn

of the group mind.'[13] Basically uninterested in the concrete, empirical conditions of mass formation and political psychology in his own time and place, Freud ultimately perceived the mass mind as a resurrection of the primal horde (*Urhorde*), enabling the individual to shirk all responsibility and return to his pristine, barbarian state.[14]

Many years later, another Jewish intellectual shaped by his stay in Vienna, Elias Canetti, would provide an imaginative literary-anthropological investigation of the formation, crystallization, rhythm and discharge of crowds which captured their internal dynamic in a way that Freudian psychoanalysis never succeeded in doing. In his *Masse und Macht*, Canetti thereby shed a new light on the interrelations between power, paranoia and the psychology of the survivor.[15] Canetti's obsession with crowds had been shaped decisively by his witnessing the burning of the *Justizpalast* in Vienna in 1927, and by the wild hysteria he had seen in the Heldenplatz at the time of Hitler's *Anschluss* in 1938.[16] As with Freud, the primitive irrationality of the crowd is a given in Canetti's work and in that of his Viennese contemporary, the philosopher and novelist Hermann Broch, who, in his American exile, devoted a special study to the subject of *Massenpsychologie*.[17] It was also Broch who later described *fin-de-siècle* Vienna as 'the metropolis of kitsch' and the centre of the European 'value-vacuum' (*Wert-Vakuum*).[18]

There is a common ground of cultural pessimism underlying the social theories of these and other Viennese writers, who, like

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ich Oberhüber hiesse ...,' *Die Freudsche Psychoanalyse zwischen Assimilation und Antisemitismus*, Frankfurt a/M. 1987, p. 92). Hitler wrote something very similar in *Mein Kampf*, also basing himself on Le Bon, but drew opposite conclusions.

13 Freud, *Civilisation, Society and Religion* (above, note 10), p. 109.

14 On Freud's distrust of the masses, his view that they respected only force and strength, and that sublimated erotic bonds were the core of their relationship with the leader, see P. Rieff, *Freud — The Mind of a Moralist*, London 1965, pp. 269–280. Although Freud did not necessarily hold that vindictive, bloodthirsty mobs represented democracy in action, Rieff believes that for him 'all politics are corrupt, in the democratic as well as in the totalitarian state' (p. 280). In this context it is interesting that Freud, as quoted by Peter Gay, dedicated his booklet *Why War?* to Benito Mussolini, 'with the devoted greeting of an old man who recognizes the cultural hero in the ruler' (P. Gay, *Freud — A Life of Our Time*, New York–London 1988, p. 448). Gay does not dwell on the possible implications of this praise for the leader of Italian Fascism.

15 E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, London 1984, pp. 15–105.

16 H.H. Zapotocky, 'Massenpsychologische Modelle des 20 Jahrhunderts mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des NS Bewegung,' *Geschichte und Gegenwart* V (1988), pp. 328–340.

17 H. Broch, *Die Idee ist Ewig — Essays und Briefe*, Munich 1968, pp. 145ff.

18 Idem, *Hugo von Hofmannstahl* (above, note 6).

Broch, emphasized the stupidity, herd-like character and lack of *Ich-Bewusstsein* in the *Massenmensch*, or who described how, in Freud's words, 'all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts, which lie dormant in individuals as relics of a primitive epoch, are stirred up to find free gratifications' in the group mind.[19] This deep-rooted scepticism, which in Europe often led to a fundamental rejection of the rationalist premises of liberal-democratic thought, was not confined to Vienna. Conservative writers like Gustave le Bon and Gabriel Tarde, the historians Hippolyte Taine and Ernest Renan or the psychologist Hippolyte Bernheim, in France, or like Scipio Sighele in Italy, saw the suggestibility and volatility of the masses as dangerous by-products of Jacobin revolutionism and of the new industrial, urban society.[20] Jacob Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche, from the standpoint of Central European high culture, denounced the inherent barbarism and 'leveling' effects of democratic politics as such. The Italian Cesare Lombroso, at the end of the nineteenth century, was instrumental in inaugurating the scientific study of crowd life as a branch of criminal anthropology.

From 1870 on, this psychopathological approach to crowd behaviour reflected a climate of disillusion with democracy within a significant portion of the European intelligentsia. This fear of and disdain for the masses seem to have been shared by the young Freud, writing from Paris in 1886 to his fiancée about the uncanny quality of the French capital and its inhabitants: 'I believe they are all possessed of a thousand demons. Instead of "Monsieur" and "Voilà l'Echo de Paris," I hear them screaming, "A la lanterne" or "A bas dieser und jener." They are the people of psychical epidemics, of historical mass convulsions.'[21] Freud's youthful fantasy of Paris as the dark city of revolution reveals his early and preponderant suspicion of mass politics. His experience in Vienna of the 1890s can only have reinforced his perception of the mass mind as analogous to the mentality of children, neurotics and despotically ruled savages, though this view reached its full crystallization only after 1918.

Not all of the Viennese *Bildungsbürgertum* shared this Freudian pessimism, although they undoubtedly feared the levelling power of the masses and were increasingly traumatized by the collapse of the liberal middle ground in Austrian politics. Right up until

19 Rieff, *Freud* (above, note 14), p. 280.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 250.
21 E. Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, New York 1953–1957, I, p. 184.

his suicide in 1942, for example, Stefan Zweig gallantly battled to maintain the values of reason and *Bildung*, inherited from the classical German Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century and refined by the supranational European cosmopolitanism of Hapsburg Austria. The notion of mobilizing the masses by means of national myths and religious symbols always remained alien to his way of thinking, which pitted the autonomy of the individual against the slavish, herd-like obedience of the masses. Zweig was convinced that humanity could advance towards universality only through cultivation of the individual and never *en masse*.[22] In his popular novels and biographies, he always sought to humanize the masses by reducing them to their individual components, demonstrating that it is the moral and intellectual capacities of single human beings which ultimately determine events.

But Zweig's poignant commitment to Europe's humanist culture rigorously excluded any *political* action (despite his militant pacifism) and literally paralyzed him in the 1930s, when he was confronted by the frenzied German masses who rallied to Hitler. Ironically, his classic memoir, *Die Welt von Gestern*, portrays the unscrupulous Austrian demagogue Lueger (who served as a political role model for the young Hitler in Vienna) as an irreproachable democrat, complacently integrated into the 'Golden Age of Security' that allegedly existed prior to 1914.[23] Only the brutalized, beer-swilling, rabidly antisemitic German Nationalist *Korpsstudenten* at the prewar Austrian universities appeared — according to Zweig — to trouble the *luxe, calme et volupté* of that era. Before the deluge, the world of theatre, poetry and music relegated political and military events to the insignificant margins of consciousness for his fellow literati of *Jung Wien*.

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22 On Stefan Zweig see G.L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism*, Bloomington 1985, pp. 19–20, 31–33, and Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna* (above, note 3), pp. 622–623, 644ff.

23 S. Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, London 1943, p. 58. Zweig describes Lueger's city administration as 'perfectly just and even typically democratic.' The Viennese Jewish writer Felix Salten was more caustic about Lueger: 'Er bestätigt die Wiener Unterschicht in allen ihren Eigenschaften, in ihrer geistigen Bedürfnislosigkeit, in ihrem Misstrauen gegen die Bildung, in ihrem Weindusel, in ihrer Liebe zu Gassenhauern, in ihrem Festhalten am Altmodischen, in ihrer übermutigen Selbstgefälligkeit.' Salten stressed that Lueger was a master of mass psychology and of channelling the unconscious desires of the crowds in the desired political direction. See F. Salten, 'Lueger,' in G. Wunberg (ed.), *Die Wiener Moderne — Literatur, Kunst und Musik zwischen 1890 und 1910*, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 124–131. On the integrative social function of Lueger's Catholic-populist antisemitism see J. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna*, Chicago 1981.

Not all the intellectuals of 'Young Vienna,' however, were as impervious as Zweig to the public sphere of politics or looked solely to the pure world of *Geist* as a secure sanctuary from religious intolerance and racial prejudice. One of the most spectacular exceptions to the rule, and one of the best examples of a *fin-de-siècle* Viennese intellectual who sought *collective* solutions together with a final exit from the disintegrating liberal culture of his age, was undoubtedly Theodor Herzl. His was a specifically political response to the broader dilemma of Jewish powerlessness throughout the long history of exile, and it entailed organizing the masses hitherto neglected by the Jewish liberal establishment in its period of ascendancy.[24] His success in capturing the imagination of the Eastern European Jewish masses (*Ostjuden*) and impressing Zionism on the consciousness of the gentile world was a *tour de force* of dramatic orchestration. It owed not a little to his intuitive yet profoundly Viennese sense of theatre, of the importance of myth, symbolism and other imponderables which unconsciously mould the life of individuals and nations.

In a collection of fragmentary thoughts for *Der Judenstaat*, Herzl wrote the following revealing lines:

> In fact, in all this I am still a dramatist. I take poor, ragged fellows from the street, dress them in beautiful garments and let them perform before the world a wonderful play which I have devised. I no longer operate with individual people, but with masses: clergy, army administration, academy, etc., all for me — *mass* units.[25]

Like many of his Viennese contemporaries, Herzl instinctively grasped the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of modern politics, the dialectical interaction between myth and objective reality. He thus intuited the relation between the unconscious forces in the lives of individuals and the structural socio-economic factors that underlay 'Jewish distress' (*Judennot*) in late nineteenth century Central and Eastern Europe. Zionism as a political mass movement presupposed this context of real misery (which distinguished it from other utopian projects like the *Freiland* plan of the liberal journalist Theodor Hertzka, a contemporary of Herzl and, like him, a Hungarian-born

24 On Herzl see Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle* (above, note 2), pp. 146–175; Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna* (above, note 3), pp. 421–457; N. Leser (ed.), *Theodor Herzl und das Wien des Fin-de-Siècle*, Vienna 1987.

25 Theodor Herzl, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, eds. A. Bein, H. Greive, M. Schärf and J.H. Schoeps, II, Berlin 1983, p. 99. See also R.S. Wistrich, 'Theodor Herzl — Between Theatre and Politics,' *Jewish Frontier*, July/August 1982, pp. 12–13.

Viennese Jew), but it also needed a sense of dynamic form and even operatic spectacle to get it off the ground. This does not mean that Herzl, the Viennese aesthete-turned-politician, consciously became an irrationalist, deliberately exploiting or manipulating the masses in order to fulfill personal ambitions or a pseudo-messianic complex (although Freud, with his innate suspicion of such political artists, probably suspected as much).[26] Herzl was responding to an objective crisis in Jewish life, acutely diagnosed in terms of the impact of modern antisemitism, which already, towards the end of the 1890s, heralded a devastating blow to the peaceful assimilation of Jews into European society.

Herzl's special contribution, however, lay less in his socio-political analysis (already anticipated fifteen years earlier by Leo Pinsker and in the early 1890s by the Austrian-born Nathan Birnbaum) than in his ability to create the illusion of power where none yet existed, by fostering in the Jews a national consciousness, a desire to overcome their fate and translate his vision of a Jewish State into a concrete, organizational goal.[27] In order to forge this aspiration to nationhood and to reawaken the dormant energies of the dispersed nation, Herzl openly played on myths, symbols and dreams — many of them drawn from the arsenal of the romantic German nationalism he had espoused in his youth. 'With a flag you can lead men,' he told the Baron de Hirsch in 1895. 'For a flag, men live and die. In fact, it is the only thing for which they are ready to die in masses, if you train them for it.'[28] Herzl always attached special importance to external symbols — hence his attention to dress, bearing, deportment, and his theatrical staging of the First Zionist Congress as an elegant, impressive and festive spectacle. Moreover, as an experienced journalist, he was convinced that 'noise is everything... in truth noise is a great deal. A sustained noise is in itself a noteworthy fact. All of world history is nothing but a

26 Freud's negative attitude towards Herzl comes to expression in the remarkable discussion he held in 1913 with the Zionist leader's only son, Hans Herzl. There he described the founder of Zionism as belonging to a dangerous breed of political psychosynthesizers — 'robbers in the underground of the unconscious world,' political leaders who specialized in 'the realization of dreams,' who 'command the world while they themselves are on the other side of the psychic mirror.' See W.J. McGrath, *Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis — The Politics of Hysteria*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1986, pp. 313–319.

27 P.J. Loewenberg, 'Theodor Herzl — A Psychoanalytical Study in Charismatic Political Leadership,' in B.B. Wolman (ed.), *The Psycho-analytic Interpretation of History*, New York 1971, pp. 150–191.

28 *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, edited, translated and with an introduction by M. Lowenthal, London 1958, p. 22.

noise.'[29] This theatrical sense of public relations, of image-building and of the power of communications, magic and make-believe in public life,[30] this readiness to tap the energies of the unconscious for political ends and to organize the masses — all these were not only a personal trademark of Herzl, the failed dramatist who had become a successful popular tribune. They also owed something to the special atmosphere of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

This background perhaps helps to explain the tenacious opposition of so many of Herzl's Jewish intellectual and artistic contemporaries in Vienna to the Zionist project.[31] In part, this opposition was a natural outcome of their 'assimilationist' ideology, of their aversion to any form of nationalism, and of the obsessive fear of many middle-class Jews that Zionism might exacerbate rather than attenuate antisemitism. But artists and intellectuals like Kraus, Schnitzler, Freud, Otto Weininger, Felix Salten, Peter Altenberg and Zweig had an inherent distrust of any collective or political solution to the 'Jewish' question — or for that matter of any attempt to mobilize the masses, even in the name of the most sublime humanist ideologies or ideals. Indeed, much of their *oeuvre* can be read as an implicit moral condemnation of *homo politicus*, of military and political hegemony based on might or violence, and as an expression of their elitist contempt for the opportunist horse-trading associated with almost any normal political activity.

However sceptical, despairing or critical of liberal values they may have been, these literati still clung to the conviction that the moral autonomy of the individual transcends any considerations of religion, ideology, nationality or politics — a belief which they felt, rightly or wrongly, to be as violated by Herzl's Zionism as it was by other mass movements.[32] The fact that this Jewish national movement was created by one of their own, by a figure who in his own person had seemed to represent the model of a cultivated Viennese liberal and to embody the assimilationist ideal, smacked to them of betrayal, if not of total despair for the future — a prospect which a majority of the Jews in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna were as yet unwilling to contemplate.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 224.
30 Loewenberg, *Theodor Herzl* (above, note 27), p. 166.
31 On the resentment aroused by Herzl's movement among many Viennese Jews see H. Zohn, 'Die Rezeption Herzls in der jüdischen Umwelt,' in Leser (ed.), *Theodor Herzl* (above, note 24), pp. 97–112; Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna* (above, note 3), pp. 445ff.
32 A representative example of this attitude is furnished by a letter written during the First World War by Stefan Zweig to Martin Buber, in which Zweig rejects the political and nationalist elements in Zionism. See S. Zweig, *Briefe an Freunde*, ed. R. Freudenthal, Frankfurt a/M. 1978, pp. 65–84.

But then, unlike Herzl, most Viennese intellectuals had not been able to analyze at close range the socio-political scene in France during the early 1890s — an experience that played a decisive role in Herzl's own metamorphosis from Viennese aesthete to would-be political artist and self-made expert on mass psychology.[33] This formative experience, chronologically parallel to Lueger's growing triumphs back in Vienna, convinced the foreign correspondent of the *Neue Freie Presse* that only by adapting and channelling the new mass politics into the interests of Jewish nationalism could a long-term solution to this people's predicament be found.

Essentially, Herzl's diagnosis of the masses, formulated on the basis of the internal crises of the French Republic, differed little from that of Freud or of other Austrian liberals. Liberal democracy, in its French variant, was no panacea for a social order in crisis, racked by anarchy, terrorism and class conflict, and threatened by the ignorance of the unenlightened masses. The French proletariat, in Herzl's eyes, resembled a 'great beast beginning to stretch its limbs' and still only half-conscious of its power.[34] The *Volk*, he would add in 1896, was everywhere behaving like a 'great child,' inherently irrational, suggestible, amorphous and fickle[35] — a description with which Freud or Schnitzler might well have agreed, and which was regularly echoed in much *fin-de-siècle* bourgeois social thought. On the other hand, Herzl also believed that positive social action was essential in order to forestall the coming revolt of the masses, of which antisemitism was so crucially and revealingly symptomatic.

This conviction eventually brought Herzl to Zionism, in May 1895, at the very moment when he witnessed the cry of the Parisian mob against Dreyfus in the Ecole Militaire ('A mort, à mort, les juifs!') and heard of Karl Lueger's first victory in elections to Vienna's city council. Against what he held to be the ineradicable antisemitism of the masses, Herzl would pit a reconstituted Jewish *Volk*, created by the power of fantasy and a dynamic politics whose emotional core was a return to the Promised Land. By activating the latent dreams of the Jewish masses and leading them out of Europe as soon as possible, he hoped to calm or at least divert the anger of gentile antisemites with their irrational fears and hatreds, about which he had no illusions. The old condescension, even contempt, towards the masses — so characteristic

33 Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle* (above, note 2), pp. 153ff.
34 T. Herzl, 'Wahlbilder aus Frankreich' (August 1893), quoted in A. Bein, *Theodor Herzl — Biographie*, Vienna 1934, p. 161.
35 T. Herzl, *Der Judenstaat*, Vienna 1933[7], p. 14.

of Austrian liberalism, and of conservative social thought in general —
was now mixed with elements of understanding and even sympathy,
particularly towards the masses of Eastern European Jews. Observing
the Jewish workers in London's East End, Herzl recognized that 'the
people are sentimental; the masses do not see clearly.'[36] Yet from this
foundation of naivety and simplicity, his legend would grow. To adopt
Schorske's striking and heavily Freudian expression, in Herzl's latter
years the Jewish masses became 'his lover and his mirror.'[37]

Potentially even more attractive to *fin-de-siècle* Viennese intellectuals,
alienated from their class, religion and culture, was the most powerful
of all the mass movements to emerge from the matrix of liberal Vienna:
the socialist workers' movement. Founded in 1889, the same year as
its great rival, the Christian-Social party, Austrian Social Democracy
early on adopted the Marxist ideology of class struggle. It stressed the
social deprivation of the urban masses (consistently ignored by classical
liberalism) and the rigorous exclusion of the working classes from the
political system. For all their demonstrative hostility to the liberals,
the Austrian Social Democrats absorbed much of their universalist
vision, their rationalist worldview, their militant anticlericalism and
their emphasis on *Bildung*.[38]

At the same time, the leader of the Austrian Social Democrats, Victor
Adler, a Jewish-born intellectual who had converted to Protestantism,
was no less successful an orchestrator and organizer of the masses
than was Herzl — or the Pan-German Georg von Schönerer, or,
for that matter, Karl Lueger. In his youth, Adler had also been
a German nationalist, a *révolté* against liberal rationalism. He was
vitally influenced by Wagner's notion of achieving a new harmonious
community of the *Volk* through the regeneration of art, and he had
also dabbled in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.[39] But Adler, the socialist

36 Idem, *Tagebucher*, Berlin 1922, I, p. 486.
37 Although Herzl was conscious of the 'irrationalist' elements in politics and knew how
    to exploit them no less effectively than contemporaries such as Lueger, he was not
    tempted by the neo-romantic, vitalist and *völkisch* trends in early Central European
    Zionism, which make their appearance in the writings of Nathan Birnbaum, Martin
    Buber, Berthold Feiwel and the artist E.M. Lilien. It is revealing that some of his
    opponents and critics in the Zionist movement sought to combine *Blut* and *Geist*, and
    to root Jewish nationalism in racial characteristics belonging to the Jewish *Volkstum*.
    See M.H. Gelber, 'The jung-jüdische Bewegung,' *Leo Baeck Yearbook*, XXXI (1986), pp.
    105–119. Herzl did not embrace irrationalist or racial ideas in his own ideology. For
    Schorske's phrase see *Fin-de-siècle* (above, note 2), p. 171.
38 Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle* (above, note 2), p. 119.
39 W.J. McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics*, New Haven–London 1974, pp. 17–39.
    Not only Victor Adler, but also Freud, Herzl, Gustav Mahler, Siegfried Lipiner and

leader, consciously rejected the irrational, aesthetic style of politics that dominated the Austrian *fin de siècle*, despite his shrewd sense of the shifting moods of the working masses and of the effect of imponderable elements in politics. In this respect, he was the antithesis of his leading nationalist and antisemitic rivals, Georg von Schönerer and Lueger, and the very opposite of a fanatic or a demagogue.[40] Adler's political style was very much in the tradition of Austrian liberalism, with its concrete empiricism, respect for law, tolerant scepticism and search for the conciliatory formula. His relentless logic and devastating irony were viewed by antisemitic contemporaries as distinctively 'Jewish,' not to say Talmudic traits.

The faith of Marxism in enlightenment, science and reason, aligned with an idealistic passion for social justice and a messianic belief in the historic role or mission of the working class, were decisive elements in attracting many Jewish intellectuals to the working class movement.[41] Yet far from being alarmed at the disastrous decline of liberalism, with the attendant rise in antisemitism, the Austrian Social Democrats, including the Jewish members, welcomed it as a step towards a greater democratization of the inequitable electoral system, and as heralding the inevitable triumph of socialism.[42] Although the *haute bourgeoisie*, the ennobled aristocracy and the liberal intelligentsia felt increasingly paralyzed by the antisemitic triumphs of the 1890s, the socialist movement insisted that they were at best a temporary, ephemeral phenomenon. Admittedly, socialist intellectuals deplored the 'clerical' demagoguery of Christian Socialism, its vulgarity and endemic *bildungshass*, pithily captured by the remark of the Christian Social deputy, Bielohlawek: 'When I see a book, I want to puke'

Heinrich Friedjung — all assimilated, Germanized Jews — were attracted in the 1870s to a cultural form of pan-Germanism, before the movement became explicitly *völkisch*, racial and exclusivist in character.

40 This is not to imply that Austrian socialism was immune to demagoguery. Some of its leaders, like Franz Schuhmeier and Engelbert Pernerstorfer, were no less effective than the Christian-Social and pan-German politicians in this regard. Moreover, Social Democracy pioneered many of the mass mobilization techniques that Hitler admired during his early years in Vienna, despite his rabid hatred of Marxism. But the ethos inculcated by Victor Adler ultimately sought to appeal to the reason and intelligence of the workers and to subordinate their class hatred to the ultimate goal of universal human emancipation. On the ideal of *Bildung* in the Austrian labour movement see A. Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism*, Chicago 1983, pp. 7–31.

41 R.S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews — The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary*, London–Toronto 1982, pp. 333–334.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 252ff.

('Wann i a Buachl siech, hab i's schon g'fressen').[43] They also ridiculed the long-standing traditions of Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*, banality and trivialization, of theatricality and sham, so ably and shamelessly exploited by Lueger. At the same time, however, they saw a certain justification for the illiberal antisemitism of the masses, which they perceived as a one-sided but ultimately beneficial (to the socialists) expression of anticapitalist *ressentiment*.

The disoriented *petit-bourgeois* masses had been duped and misled by the deceptive slogans characteristic of a backward, semi-feudal society where industrial capitalism had not yet made significant progress. Once the 'small man' (*Kleinbürger*) understood that not all Jews were capitalists and not all capitalists were Jews, once he realized that only the Social Democrats were serious about overthrowing capitalism as a whole, antisemitism would gradually fade away. In the meantime, the antisemitic movement was a nuisance, not so much because it attacked Jews, but because, by exploiting the basest and most contemptible instincts of the masses, it was turning on values that the Social Democrats held dear: freedom of thought, science, progress and education.[44] The Austrian socialist intellectuals remained overconfident, however, that the workers would never succumb completely to this antisemitic fanaticism and irrationality, thanks to their highly developed organizations, their class consciousness and the tremendous efforts which the party had invested in educating and enlightening them.

No other socialist party in Europe (except, possibly, the German Social Democratic Party [SPD]) placed such emphasis on its *Bildungsvereine* and on *Kulturpolitik*, on the creation of a social, cultural and spiritual 'state within a state' even prior to 1914, and particularly between the two world wars. During the inter-war period, Red Vienna saw itself as a bastion against the growing antidemocratic forces in the Austrian Republic. Not even the mindless hysteria of the patriotic crowds in the Ringstrasse, demonstrating in favour of the First World War, shook the optimistic faith of the Marxist intelligentsia in the historical mission and capacity of the masses for self-liberation.

A chastened Victor Adler confessed to the young Trotsky in August 1914: 'All the unbalanced, all the madmen now come into the streets; it is their day. The murder of Jaurès is only the beginning. War opens

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43 Quoted in I. Barea, *Vienna — Legend and Reality*, London 1966, p. 317.
44 'Der christlich-soziale Landtag,' *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), 6 June 1899; 'Die Wiener Arbeiterschaft gegen die klerikale Seuche,' *ibid.*, 18 July 1899.

the door to all instincts, all forms of madness.'[45] For all his Marxist faith and rationalist logic, Adler, originally a psychiatric practitioner and a leader with a deep understanding of and empathy with the labouring masses, had few illusion about Austrian politics. As he said in jest to Trotsky, his former profession had prepared him splendidly for dealing with the 'lunatic asylum' of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese public life.[46] In this case, however, the study of depth psychology did not undermine the optimistic faith of the Social Democrat in the possibility of a free citizenry and a socialist society, leading to the creation of a new, liberated and non-alienated humanity. Unlike Freud, Adler did not assume that the masses are forever childish, inherently hostile to culture, thirsting only for violent instinctual release and longing for erotic submission to the leader. Adler — unlike some of his more demagogic followers — was definitely not an example of the *Führer* as *Verführer* (seducer); he epitopmized, rather, the political leader as educator, physician and organizer seeking to humanize the masses and sublimate their revolutionary energy towards the classical goal of *Bildung*.[47]

However, the ethical ideals of Austrian Marxism, like those of European bourgeois humanism, proved somewhat fragile in face of Fascism's growing mass appeal in Central Europe between the two world wars. One of the sharpest critics of the failure of Marxism to overcome this challenge was Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian disciple of Marx and Freud whose study, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (written between 1930 and 1933), was an important analytic breakthrough in the field.[48]

45 L. Trotsky, *Political Profiles*, London 1972, p. 45.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 17. Trotsky was a great admirer of Victor Adler's tactical skills, organizational ability and human qualities, even though Adler was essentially a reformist Social Democrat, far removed from the revolutionary radicalism of the Russian Marxists.
47 McGrath, in *Dionysian Art* (above, note 39, pp. 242–246), suggests that Adler drew on the Wagnerian ideals of his youth, his sophisticated knowledge of symbolic psychology and his artistic sensibility (he was a great lover of Mahler's music) in activating mass feeling on behalf of socialism. What, then, was the essential difference between Adler and Lueger, beyond questions of ideology or the fact that the former was a genuine idealist and the latter a more cynical and pragmatic opportunist? Rabbi Joseph Samuel Bloch, a contemporary of both and a leading Jewish politician in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, made the following insightful comment with regard to Lueger: 'The criterion which makes the difference between a great man and a popular one consists in the great man's searching for what is nobly human in the masses, to raise them by its means [this would surely apply to Adler], whereas a merely popular man looks for what is low and brutal so as to raise himself' (J.S. Bloch, *My Reminiscences*, Vienna–Berlin 1923, p. 233).
48 W. Reich, *Die Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*, Cologne 1971.

Wilhelm Reich, younger and more radical, who had already gravitated towards the Austrian Communist Party, did not share Freud's theory of sublimation: the premise that repression sustains society and that permissiveness tends to subvert civilization. Nor could he accept the materialist assumption that mass psychology was rooted solely or even primarily in socio-economic factors. Reich deplored the ignorance displayed by Marxist sociology of the role of sexual repression. He saw the roots of Fascism, above all, in the authoritarian family structure produced by 4,000 years of mechanical civilization, which had disturbed the biological system of the human personality and ended up turning the masses into accomplices in their own oppression. The secret, unsatisfied orgiastic desires of the masses were expressed in the brutality, irrationality and sadism of Hitler and the Nazis, whose mystical racial theories faithfully reflected a deep sexual *angst* and the unresolved fears of a patriarchal, authoritarian society. Only a revolutionary *Sexualpolitik*, a libido-saturated *Gemeinschaft*, could ultimately liberate man from the kind of compulsive mass behaviour, blind obedience and reactionary herd mentality that made Fascism possible. This sexual revolution would finally enable the masses to assume responsibility for themselves. Reich thereby sought to politicize Freud's theories — additional grounds for the old master to disown his disciple, quite apart from his puritanical distaste for Reich's 'Sexual Revolution.'[49]

Like so many other Viennese intellectuals of his generation, Freud remained deeply ambivalent about politics in general, about parliamentarianism (once described by Kraus as a way of 'putting political prostitution in barracks') and about democracy, at least so long as the old monarchical order survived. Other Viennese cultural conservatives (including more than a few Jewish intellectuals), suspicious of technology and progress, as alienated from the ethos of capitalism as they were from materialist Marxism, also felt that commitment to social and political change was incompatible with a meaningful belief in individual truth and morality. Their disillusion with political ideologies, their sense of the slow, irreversible decline of the monarchy, their inability or unwillingness to synthesize the totality of human thought and experience into a coherent system, and their attachment to or rebellion against the prevailing climate of aestheticism

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49 Reich later became utterly disillusioned with Marxism and sought to play down the political aspect of his differences with Freud. See M. Higgins & C.M. Raphael (eds.), *Reich Speaks of Freud,,* London 1975.

in Vienna — all these encouraged a disengagement from politics and an elitist distrust of mass democracy.[50] As Kraus put it in a polemic against the socialist *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in November 1917: 'The definition of the problem in terms of democracy versus autocracy is as empty a formulation as the vacuum of the age, which is merely more marked here in Austria than elsewhere in Europe.'[51]

What really preoccupied Kraus and his contemporaries was rescuing the culture of the free individual from the pressures of modern life. Vienna, a hive of antisemitic reaction, had been one of the first major European cities to discover the pathological aspect of modernity, one of whose features, the irrationalism of the masses, remained a central component of the gradual democratization of public life.[52] To the liberal intelligentsia, this made the salvaging of what could still be preserved of the tradition of the Enlightenment seem particularly difficult and precarious. This climate was not unique to Vienna, but was rather a shared European experience of the *fin de siècle*, confronted by the preliminary rumblings and the first glimmer of the twentieth-century revolt of the masses. The special fascination exerted by Vienna's cultural elites today seems to derive, at least in part, from a precocious disillusion with what has been termed the failed progressivism of modernity. From a perspective of nearly one hundred years, what Herman Broch once called the 'Gay Apocalypse' has all the discreet, beguiling and fatal charm of a light opera rescripted by Oswald Spengler, in somewhat premature celebration of the decline of Western civilization.

50 For a thoughtful account of the *zeitgeist*, as exemplified in the work of an outstanding non-Jewish writer and intellectual who grew up in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, see D.S. Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture*, Berkeley 1980.
51 Quoted in Timms, *Karl Kraus* (above, note 8), p. 362.
52 On the unique features of Vienna as a possible negative paradigm for twentieth-century 'modernity' see F. Heer, 'Explosionen-Wien und sein Untergrund,' *Emuna*, VIII (1973), pp. 83–110: 'Hier, in Wien, wird am Modell der Höllen-Stadt Wien, die Pathologie der Massen-Gesellschaft, die Pathologie politischer Konflikte, die Pathologie der ungereiften Person, erstmalig erkundet.' Heer was one of the first to emphasize that Adolf Hitler, that virtuoso 'auf der Klaviatur der Massenseele,' picked up the essential foundations of his National Socialist *weltanschauung* — his mixture of pan-German nationalism, fanatical antisemitism, xenophobia and Social Darwinism — in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

David Ohana

The 'Anti-Intellectual' Intellectuals
as Political Mythmakers

The European thinkers, culture-critics and artists who formed
Nietzsche's existential school created a new political style of
'anti-intellectual' intellectuals, giving myth precedence over reason.
Prominent European intellectuals of the period between 1870 and 1930
— Georges Sorel and his followers in Europe, the Italian futurists, the
cubo-futurists in Russia, the English vorticists and various German
thinkers from Ludwig Klages to Ernst Jünger — all questioned the
rational and progressive interpretation of the course of history, and
denied any possibility of understanding it objectively. Although they
lived in different countries and held opposing political beliefs, striking
similarities are evident in their basic concepts and modes of thought,
in the nature of their revolt and in their political aspirations. They
served as originators or prototypes for militant ideological groups
characterized by a total rejection of the norms prevailing in their society
and a yearning for an alternative reality. These thinkers challenged the
equation of modernity with reason. Modernity, they argued, could,
and indeed should, have other dimensions. They thereby replaced
the prevailing view of the intellectual as the proponent of a moral
and rational universalism with the conception of the intellectual-as-
mythmaker.
   Whereas proponents of historicism, romanticism, determinism and
the doctrine of progress viewed man as a product of history, dependent
on tradition and culture, the 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals wished to
identify reality with the individual and the community; this, as they saw
it, was the epitome of the existential idea. They rejected the past-fixation
of historicism and romanticism and the future-fixation of the cult of
enlightenment and progress in favour of the active present. Since reality
was dynamic, man, they felt, should reject the strictures of the past
in order to stay in tune with the rhythm of the modern world. Their
revolt against historical continuity, classical tradition, Judeo-Christian

ethics and the principles of the Enlightenment (affirming the rational, moral and egalitarian unity of mankind) led modern mythmakers to view the modern world in aesthetic terms, an amoral conception that differed radically from the classical aesthetics of the Enlightenment. This parting of aesthetics from morality was the outstanding feature of the revolt against the bourgeois world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the concept of the 'aesthetic education of mankind' could be found in Schiller, Kant, Schelling and Schopenhauer, the innovation of the 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals was to amalgamate the political dimension, existential experience, aesthetic language and awareness of modernity into a modern political mythology.

Friedrich Nietzsche initiated this intellectual revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. Overturning Schopenhauer's pessimism, Nietzsche heralded the transition from ethics to aesthetics. His basic assumption that the universe could be justified as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, rather than as a moral order, raised aesthetics to an unprecedented level of importance.[1] Nietzsche was the first thinker to deny any connection between aesthetics, on the one hand, and reason, morality or truth, on the other. He attempted to lay bare the essential condition of the world, to uncover phenomena and values that had taken root in the course of history. By stripping away philosophical camouflage and historical deception, one could expose the basic foundations and reach the bedrock of chaotic existence itself. Thus, Nietzsche's philological deciphering of the myths of Western culture served as a point of departure for the reorientation of philosophy. He was a radical thinker who attempted to reach the core of Western culture, posing a modern challenge to traditional philosophy in the same way as Vico did to history, Marx to political economy and Freud to psychology.

The paradoxical result of the death of God was the birth of the self-created man. Nietzsche inspired the 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals by turning from historicism — or historiology, as Thomas Mann called it[2] — to myth, from reason to experience, from the pursuit of truth to the building of living culture, from the general to the unique, from the objective to the perspective, and from an optimistic belief in progress to a cyclical concept of history. The significance of Nietzschean myth lay

1   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, English transl. by Walter Kaufmann, New York, 1967, § 5.

2   T. Mann, *Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events*, Washington, D.C., 1947, p. 1.

in its fundamental assumption of the ability of the individual to create a world in his own image, and in this way to establish a correlation between modern man and his modern world not through rational processes, but by means of a new myth: 'Without myth, every culture loses the healthy power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myth completes and unifies a whole cultural movement'.[3]

Nietzsche was the first thinker to establish a clear distinction for the modern age between philosophers who focussed on truth, logos and the objective, and philosophers who focussed on culture, mythos and the perspective. This had hitherto been the distinction between philosopher and artist, but Nietzsche's originality created a bridge between them, for by constructing a new myth the philosopher became a maker of culture. Three subsequent German thinkers postulated that myth was the basis of every vital culture: Alfred Weber pointed out that each culture is expressed in a certain myth;[4] Spengler predicted that a new culture would emerge wherever a myth is created;[5] and Burckhardt described the Faustian myth of modern European culture.[6] While the traditional philosopher or intellectual looked backwards, like the owl of Minerva, in order to preserve an objective opinion, the new intellectual dwelt in the eye of the storm and created reality *ex nihilo*. Where Plato sought a philosopher-king who would unite reason and power, Nietzsche sought a philosopher-artist who would unite aesthetics and philosophy. The innovation of the 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals was their desire to re-create chaos; in their opinion, it was only in a state of conflict that man could create aesthetic myths for the modern world. This 'myth *ex nihilo*' was not a part of reality, but a fruit of the imagination, an aesthetic creation, a self-created consciousness which annihilated the universality of Western culture.

This anti-rationalist revolt led to a contempt for rational intellectuals like Hegel or Durkheim. Not philosophical reflection but political activism, was now demanded, and reason ceased to be the 'raison d'être' of politics. Myth was now placed at the centre of the new existential idea.[7] The modern world was stripped of its ethical

3 Nietzsche, *The Birth* (above, note 1), § 23.
4 Alfred Weber in his *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* differentiated between 'Kultur,' characterized by myth, and 'Civilization,' characterized by rational activity.
5 O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, English transl. by C.F. Atkinson, London 1926, p. 106.
6 Burckhardt's remark, quoted by Jung, is not the only one connecting Faust to modernism; Thomas Mann's Dr. Faustus also related to Nietzsche.
7 See especially E. Cassirer, 'Judaism and the Modern Political Myths,' *Symbol, Myth, and Culture*, New Haven 1979, pp. 233–241.

and rational purpose, with aesthetics, in the language of myth, providing its key. Cultural nihilism became the cornerstone of modern aesthetics,changing it from a theory of beauty to a creative force. The focus shifted from the rational and historical dimension to the mythical and aesthetic dimension: the aesthetic justification of a world divested of values replaced the old criteria of good and evil, the products of Judeo-Christian ethics, with new criteria affirming the authentic and non-decadent, the strong as opposed to the weak, the order or militant community as opposed to the collective, the future as opposed to the past.

Georges Sorel was the first political philosopher to point out the possibility of putting into practice a systematic theory of myth. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Schelling had created a comparative mythology in his book *The Philosophy of Mythology*. Sorel, however, went further, stressing the role of political myth in history.[8] Ideology, for Sorel, was too abstract, general and non-affective to be instrumental in a political mobilization of the masses. According to his theory of social psychology, people are socialized not by means of ideology, but through a common experience of action; in the words of Irving Louis Horowitz, 'this is the pragmatic value of mythology.'[9]

Criticism and creativity are the two faculties which mark the intellectual. In the case of Sorel, his phenomenological interpretation and analysis of myths in past societies place him among the sociologists of myth, while his invention of the myth of the general strike, which was so central to his political thought, shows him as a creator of myths. This duality was a distinctive characteristic of Sorel's political philosophy, often leading to a conceptual confusion between the creation of myths and their interpretation.

Sorel insisted that myths are of paramount importance in the modern world and disagreed with the claim that myths play a role only in primitive societies.[10] He opposed the view, later formulated by the sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, that there is an unbridgeable gap between primitive ways of thinking and modern thought processes.[11] If myth is a product typical of primitive societies, how is one to explain

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8 D. Ohana, 'Georges Sorel and the Rise of Political Myth,' *Journal of European History*, XIII (1991).
9 I.L. Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt against Reason: The Social Theories of Georges Sorel*, London 1961, pp. 129–140.
10 G. Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*, Paris 1908, p. 34.
11 L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris 1910.

its reappearance in sophisticated cultures of the twentieth century?[12] The creators of modern political myths were by no means primitive. Sorel concluded that myth is a permanent feature of human culture and that man is a 'mythical animal.'

Unlike Vico, Durkheim, and later Cassirer, Sorel did not confine himself to the phenomenology of social myths in history and contemporary society, but created a political mythology for French and European society. If the fuel that activated history was not ideology but myth, then it was necessary to create a new myth to revitalize the stagnant political life of the turn of the nineteenth century.[13] The proposed cure for the lethargy of the proletariat was an activating political violence, of the type which Sorel and his disciples on both the radical left and the radical right had come to regard as the generator of the historical process. The myth of violence, they believed, would reinvigorate the militancy of socialism and nationalism and spur these on to a new and dynamic course of action. What mattered to Sorel was not ideological content but the test of authenticity constituted by violence and heroic action. In his paean of praise for early heroic civilizations, his condemnation of the illusions of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and his promotion of the myth of the general strike, Sorel was searching for a heroic and militant ethos. Sorelian myth should be understood in a new way, as a means not to some ideological purpose but to mobilize heroic action, regarded as an end in itself. Such metaphorical and aesthetic action is devoid of content and completely nihilistic.[14]

This Sorelian 'myth *ex nihilo*' is unconnected with any historical context; it is pure political fantasy. A myth, unlike a utopia, is not a vision of a perfect future society but an act of creating a counter-society by means of battle. It is an act of creation, not of prediction. The Sorelian myth of violence is nihilistic with regard to the given historical reality: 'Our myths lead people to prepare for battle to defeat the existing order.'[15] They express no ideological or moral purpose, but lead to heroic action for its own sake. Only by means of a mythical state of mind can a militant group maintain its solidarity, heroism and spirit

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12 E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven 1946, p. 11.
13 D. Ohana, 'The Role of Myth in History: Nietzsche and Sorel,' in *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism in Europe and America: Essays presented in honor of Y. Arieli*, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 119–140.
14 For another point of view, see Z. Sternhell, M. Sznajder & M. Asheri, *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste*, Paris 1989.
15 Sorel, *Réflexions* (above, note 10), p. 46.

of self-sacrifice.[16] The myth of the general strike was a medium rather than a message; it was important not for its political content, but for its potential to mobilize.

Paradoxically, Sorel himself, opponent of utopias and would-be creator of a modern political mythology, became the creator of a belligerent utopia. There are several grounds for asserting the utopian character of Sorel's conceptualization of the general strike.[17] First of all, it had no historical roots and was entirely directed towards the future, contradicting Sorel's basic belief that myth is a creation not of man, but of history alone. Second, the general strike bore what he classified as one of the characteristics of a utopia: it was the theoretical construction of an intellectual — Sorel himself. Thirdly, the concept created an *a priori* model of a 'new man' — also a basic characteristic of a utopia. Moreover, the general strike was an abstract idea which did not affect the real life of human beings or their historical experience; it was an expectation of a violent apocalyptic event. In the hoped-for day of judgement, the workers, organized in syndicates, would bring down the world of the bourgeoisie with a series of strikes or with a single huge strike. The utopia of the general strike would create a community of fighters, a sect of heroes, a proletarian elite which would constitute a model worthy of emulation by society at large. This community of heroes would be forged in the crucible of permanent conflict, creating a heroic and a productive new man. This model of the heroic utopia is already found in 'Sorel's early writings on the civilizations of the ancient Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans and the early Christians.[18] Sorel thus fashioned an anthropological-mythical model and applied it time and again to changing political circumstances, from the end of the French Second Empire up to the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Fascism in Italy, three months before his death.

In his vision of revolutionary syndicalism, Sorel presented a model for a violent, myth-bearing and *ricorso*-disseminating elite as the first structural embodiment of the Sorelian order. He viewed the syndicate as a political-educational organization and as a microcosm of his heroic society of producers, but his failure to attract the proletariat made him search for new orders to carry the myth. From 1908 onwards, and

16 L. Kolakowski, 'Georges Sorel: A Jansenist Marxism,' *Main Currents of Marxism*, II, English transl. by P.S. Falla, Oxford 1985, p. 160.
17 F.E. Manuel and F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984, p. 755.
18 G. Sorel, *Contribution à l'étude profane de la Bible*, Paris 1889; *Le procès de Socrate*, Paris 1889; *La ruine du monde antique*, Paris 1901; *Le système historique de Renan*, Paris 1902.

especially after the First World War, Sorel envisaged the revolutionary movement in more real terms, and his concept of revolution passed from the theoretical to the political domain. Violent struggle turned from an abstract idea into the function of an organized group, such as the 'Camelots du roi' on the right or the 'Red Army' on the left.[19] Furthermore, Sorel extended the concept of myth beyond the revolutionary movement to the postrevolutionary order, an order that would not only protect the violent but would also produce a permanent structure that would remain after the revolution had been completed.

Sorel searched continuously for a heroic order to be the bearer of the 'myth *ex nihilo*' that he had created for modern politics. Throughout all his various changes of attitude, myth was the constant factor in his political biography. This applies to every phase of his career: his revision of Marxism in 1895, which gave birth to revolutionary syndicalism; his flirtation with the radical socialist parties and his sympathy for the C.G.T.; the crisis of syndicalism in 1908; his rapprochement from that time on with the nationalist movement and the Action Française; his founding of the nationalist newspaper *l'Independance* in 1911; his inspiration of the syndicalist-monarchist-nationalist Cercle Proudhon, and his general shift of emphasis in the years 1908-1913 from the social dimension to the national dimension; the discovery of Bolshevism in 1918 as a new myth, with Moscow as the Rome of the proletariat, and of the Russian Revolution as a modern *ricorso*; his welcoming of the rapprochement of the national and syndicalist forces in Italy, his sympathy for the Tripolitanian adventure and his enthusiasm for the revolutionary and dynamic nature of the Mussolini phenomenon.

Sorel influenced the futurists, the nationalists and the syndicalists, the three groups which in 1919 founded the 'fasci di combattimento' in Italy.[20] The futurists, like Sorel, began with the nihilistic dilemma; they emphasized activity and dynamism for their own sake, and directed the myth towards political experience. Their glorification of the myth of war was reflected not only in writing, but also in action. The futurists contributed to the rise of Italian Fascist ideology, though only a minority joined the Fascist regime, and then not with the expected enthusiasm. In 1924, before the murder of the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti, Marinetti wrote about a 'minimum futurist programme,' though he still

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19 J.J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians*, Berkeley 1980.
20 A. Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929*, London 1973, pp. 368-370, 385-386; G.B. Furiozzi, 'Sorel e l'Italia: Bibliografia ragionata,' *Annali della Facoltà di Scienze Politiche di Perugia*, 1968-1970, pp. 119-178; U. Piscopo, 'I futuristi e Sorel,' *Volume collectif, Georges Sorel: Studi e ricerche*, Florence 1975, pp. 5-7.

hoped to realize a maximal futurism. In many respects, futurism can be considered the ideal type of Fascism: unlike the Fascist movement in Italy, which was forced to compromise with the complex Italian reality in order to achieve political success and establish itself as a regime, the futurist movement was able to remain modern, secularist and antiroyalist, and at the same time national-revolutionary, antisocialist and antiparliamentarian.

The Italian futurist movement, more than any other avant-garde movement in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, typified what Allan Bullock has called the 'double image' of modernism.[21] While the futurists exposed major characteristics of the modern age, such as simultaneity, dynamism, speed, and industrial and urban aesthetics,[22] they also generated their own new political myths, such as 'revolutionary nationalism,' 'heroic technology' and 'mechanized warfare.' The latter activity created a political style that moulded and guided Fascist ideology in its revolutionary and formative stage.[23] This dual face of futurism, its combination of 'modernism' and Fascism, simultaneously constituted both an analysis of 'the traumatic crisis of modernization,'[24] as Renzo De Felice called it, and a proposed solution, involving a dynamic political style. The challenge the futurists set themselves was to build a bridge, by means of political action, between the aesthetic concept of 'modernism' and the sociological concept of 'modernization,' or in another words, between myth and political reality. Their style was the product of a technological utopian vision and a modern political myth representing the integration of what the futurists called the 'new man' into the new industrial society. Vladimir Tatlin's statement, 'we created the art before we had the society,'[25] referred to constructivism and revolutionary Russia, but it could well be applied to Italian futurism and its role in paving the way to the Fascist society.

21 A. Bullock, 'The Double Image,' in M. Bradbury and J. McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism 1890–1930*, London 1976, pp. 58–70.
22 As Giovanni Papini wrote: 'Marinetti ... obliged a large part of the somnolent and rheumatic Italian bourgeoisie to interest itself in new problems of art and literature, and to enter into violent contact with the researches of the new European spirit' (*Passato remoto*, Florence 1984, p. 263).
23 Cf. Benedetto Croce's statement in *La Stampa* (15 May 1924) that 'the ideological origins of Fascism can be found in futurism.'
24 R. De Felice, 'Ideologia,' in P. Hulten (ed.), *Futurismo e futurismi*, Milan 1986, pp. 488–492.
25 Quoted in Bullock, 'The Double Image' (above, note 21), p. 70.

Futurism represented the phenomenon of an artistic-political movement, the first of its kind in modern Europe, in which art did not serve politics and politics was not the product of art: the art of the futurists was political in the most immediate sense of the word. In contrast to the artistic character of the schools of impressionism, cubism, expressionism and surrealism, and in contrast to the home-grown artistic movements of totalitarian regimes, the futurists as political artists created a modern political mythology with war at its centre. For them, the rejection of history was not an idea or a philosophical statement: violence towards the past was in itself an authentic act of liberation. The destruction of past civilization (passeism) was to be performed through a modern and futuristic synthesis of art and politics. The previously automatic association of primitivism with the past was replaced by a new association of primitivism with the future. Marinetti thought that the cult of the future and of dynamism, symbolized by the aeroplane, possessed a mythical, archaic quality: 'The poet must spend himself with ardour, splendour, enhance the fiery passion of the primordial elements.'[26] Marinetti's use of 'primitive' elements (fire, rain, night) in his founding manifesto demonstrated that there was no necessary contradiction between the longing for the mythic and a modern vision.

The futurists' declared goal was not to renew but to express the new, to be a faithful channel of expression for their time. Because the present was still bound by the chains of the old consciousness, they invented new forms of expression appropriate to the future, a kind of artistic science-fiction: Prampolini's colours of sounds, Carra's syntheses of sounds and smells, Boccioni's pictorial dynamism, the futurist theatre which placed the audience in the centre, and an architecture which envisaged the city of the future. The futurists fused this new language of modernism with the political, mythical and aesthetic facets of technology.[27]

The myth of the racing car ideally expressed the dual character of the 'futurist syndrome': a search for reckless energy and regulated order at one and the same time. If, for Jules Verne, the machine was an achievement of progress or an expression of technological competence, and if, in the De Stijl movement, the machine served humanity as a means and rather than an end, for Marinetti the racing car was nothing

26 F.T. Marinetti, 'Fondazione e manifesto del Futurismo,' in idem, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria, Milan 1968, pp. 7–14.
27 G. Mosse, 'Futurism and the Political Culture of Europe: A General Perspective,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXV (1990).

less than the full expression of modernism.[28] The futurists did not attempt to gain a deep understanding of the effects of mechanization in terms of social change. They regarded the aesthetics of speed as a primary expression of the flow of modern life:[29] a flow without direction, a phenomenon without a purpose and a race without an objective. For the futurists, eternity was static, while the machine expressed the dynamic moment.

Futurist dynamism postulated a new morality: 'the new religion — the morality of speed,' to use Marinetti's expression, was to replace Christian morality. Human energy was manifest in speed, which dominated time and space. While Christian morality restrained sensuality and instinct, the *raison d'être* of the new futurist morality was to protect man from slowness, memory, analysis, slumber and habit. The futurist aesthetics of speed superseded traditional criteria of good and evil: 'After the destruction of the antique good and the antique evil, we create a new good, speed, and a new evil, slowness.'[30] The replacement of the old values of 'good' and 'evil' by the modern values of 'speed' and 'slowness' showed an awareness of new models of existence for the modern world, characterized by intensity and dynamism.

The futurists urged the Italian public to join the First World War, because it constituted an entry ticket into the modern world. It was the scene of the great confrontation between futurism and passeism, and therefore Italy could not afford to stand aside. The war's outbreak marked the climax of the futurist movement, and also the beginning of its decline. Marinetti and Russolo were wounded, and two central and highly promising artists — the painter Boccioni and the architect Sant'Elia — were killed. As for Ernst Jünger in Germany, who was also wounded but continued to admire the first mechanized war, for the futurists, too, the war served as a fruitful myth for their political activities and a technological vision which harmonized with their modern and dynamic style. Aesthetic dynamism superseded the old ideologies: 'We Italian futurists have amputated all the ideologies and

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28 Marinetti, 'A' L'automobile de course,' in Z. Folejewski, *Futurism and Its Place in the Development of Modern Poetry: A Comparative Study and Anthology*, Ottawa 1980, pp. 154–155; idem, 'La Mort tient le volant,' *La Ville charnelle*, Paris 1908.

29 P. Bergman, 'L'Esthétique de la Vitesse, origins et première manifestation,' *Présence de F.T. Marinetti, Actes du colloque international tenu à l'UNESCO*, Lausanne 1982, pp. 13–25.

30 Marinetti, 'La nuova religione-morale della velocità,' *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, pp. 130–137.

everywhere imposed our new conception of life, our formulas for spiritual health, our aesthetic and social dynamism.'[31]

The war was no longer regarded as the ideological expression of a leftist or rightist outlook; it was a reflection of the nature of the modern world. Although war and violence were not in themselves the essence of modernism, modern war was likely to be nihilistic, as Walter Benjamin expressed it, because it became an ideological aim in itself, a self-sufficient process and a phenomenon of aesthetic pleasure.[32] For the futurists, there were no bounds to the redemptive power of destruction and the vital strength of conflict. In this respect, the myth of modern war or 'heroic technology' provided the motive force for the nihilistic temperament of futurism. In their revolt against the rationalistic and harmonious tradition of the Enlightenment, the futurists saw war as a reality of perpetual conflict, an anvil upon which the futurist 'new man' would be forged.

Three years after Marinetti declared his intention 'to liberate this country from the stinking gangrene of the professors, the archaeologists, the professional guides and the antique-dealers,' Mayakovsky and his Russian friends wrote in the *Manifesto of the Russian Futurists* (1912): 'The past is crowded. The academy and Pushkin are more incomprehensible than hieroglyphics. Throw Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, et al., overboard from the ship of modernity.'[33] In destroying bourgeois expressions of the past such as syntax, painting and architecture, Russian futurism sought to pave the way for a revolution that would be in harmony with the innovations of modern times. Russian futurism was part of a universal revolution against an old world embodied in fixed forms and a closed consciousness. In Mayakovsky's poetry, the Russian word 'byt,' signifying a fixed pattern of life, became a symbol of the bourgeois values that would have to be destroyed in order to make way for a new world: 'It is not enough that we should visualize and build the new; we also have to blow up the old.'[34] By means of linguistic innovations, the Russian modernists sought to create a new model of human existence and a new social environment.

Mayakovsky's myth of the 'revolution' was rooted in the language of Christian martyrology. The poetry of the atheistic revolution was

31 Marinetti, 'Al di là del Comunismo,' *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 437.
32 W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, English transl. by H. Lohn, London 1968, pp. 219–254.
33 D. Burliuk, A. Kruchenykh, V. Mayakovsky & V. Khlebnikov, 'A Slap in the Face of Public Taste,' in V. Markov (ed.), *Russian Futurism: A History*, Berkeley 1968, p. 46.
34 E.J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution*, New Jersey 1973, pp. 204–206.

paradoxically expressed in religious concepts: 'With a crown of thorns of the revolution ... I strung myself up on the cross.'[35] But this paradox was only apparent: a myth is essentially irrational, and its objectives, however practical, therefore inhabit a twilight zone in relation to accepted rational conceptions. This religious terminology helped make the revolution acceptable as a myth in the service of politics. The revolutionary-religious image completely captured Mayakovsky, who, like Walt Whitman, existentially identified the revolution with himself. His revolutionary poetry opposed the world of bourgeois imagery with a futuristic language which he claimed would be the complete opposite of the conformist and harmonistic language of the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois symbolic language, reflecting cultural continuity, would give way to a direct political language using eschatological images from Christian martyrology. The heroes of Mayakovsky's myth were the Russian people and Lenin; his poem on the leader of the revolution ('Lenin') parallels Marinetti's poetic portrait of Mussolini. Mayakovsky, like Marinetti, belonged to the tradition of 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals who sought the 'essential' in modern technology. His revolutionary iconoclasm proclaimed 'a world dazzled by a new myth.'[36]

Wyndham Lewis (1884–1956) was another major figure of the futurist brand of 'anti-intellectual' intellectual. In his artistic productions, Lewis, an English painter, writer and cultural critic, and the editor of the journal *Blast* (1913–1914), gave varied expression to an aesthetic vision using a revolutionary metaphysical idiom characterized by images and symbols of the machine age. Vorticism, the artistic movement that he headed on the eve of the First World War, and his book *Hitler* (1931), an encomium of the up-and-coming German leader, exemplified the two faces of Fascism: aesthetic nihilism contained within a totalitarian structure.[37] Lewis's futurist paintings were influenced, notwithstanding his denials, by the Italian movement, as Marinetti was careful to point out when he visited London in 1914.The leading figures in the vorticist movement were William Roberts (1895–1980), David Bomberg (1890–1957), Christopher Richard V. Nevinson (1889–1946), and the sculptors Jacob Epstein (1880–1959) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska

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35 D.V. Barooshian, *Russian Cubo-Futurism 1910–1930: A Study in Avant-Gardism*, New York 1976, p. 43.

36 G. Lehrmann, 'De Marinetti à Mayakovsky,' Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Lausanne 1942, p. 52.

37 F. Jameson, *Fables of Agression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Berkeley, Calif., 1979.

(1891–1915), who was killed in the First World War. These artists attempted to express the cold metallic crystallization of the vortex of the twentieth century. Marshal McLuhan, a friend of Lewis, declared that his object had been to capture the modern world as a perpetual vortex and as a significant expression of human energy.[38] It is not surprising that the major philosophical influence on Lewis was that of Nietzsche, or that he wrote of Sorel, in his book *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), that he was 'the key to all contemporary political thought.'[39] Recent scholarship has overlooked the political aspects of the vorticist vision, appreciating Lewis only as one of the most gifted creators of a new artistic language at the onset of the twentieth century.[40]

Thus, if Nietszche combined philosophy and aesthetics to create the *Uebermensch*; and if Sorel united aesthetics and politics in the myth of the 'general strike'; the 'futurist syndrome' correlated art, technology and politics in the myth of the 'glorious war' or revolution. The German 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals, for their part, were particularly concerned with the dichotomy between history and myth. From the turn of the century, a school emerged in Germany which rebelled against Hegel's philosophy of history and Ranke's science of history. Major German intellectuals such as Dilthey, Simmel, Scheler, Weber and Spengler sought a new perspective on the world and a new approach to history, opposing the scientific objectivism, historicism and Marxist materialism which then prevailed. Spengler, in his book *The Decline of the West* (1919, 1922), attempted to define a morphology of history, a system of symbols in which forms operated through myths to order the cultural-economic reality. According to Spengler, man does not create history; rather, it is forms (*Gestalten*) that mould man. Spengler's influence led several circles in Germany, including Ernst Jünger's, to regard history as a symbolic and aesthetic phenomenon, a series of actions ruled by a dominating form. Georg Lukács criticized this view in his controversial work *The Destruction of Reason*, arguing that these world-creating forms or myths were not human agents determining the course of history, but merely principal actors 'in the

38 M. McLuhan, 'Le Vortex de Lewis: Art et politique en tant que masques du pouvoir,' *Wyndham Lewis et le Vorticisme: Cahiers pour un temps*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1982, pp. 175–180.
39 W. Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, London 1926, p. 128.
40 J. Symons, *Makers of the New: The Revolution in Literature 1912–1939*, New York 1987; R.T. Chapman, *Wyndham Lewis: Fictions and Satires*, London 1973; T. Materer, *Wyndham Lewis: The Novelist* , Detroit 1976.

drama of history.'[41] Lukács discerned a dehumanization of history in Spengler's and Jünger's attempts to find metaphysical principles of history more basic than the materialist historical approach of Marx.

There was a similarity between the views of Jünger and those of Ludwig Klages, an author and a member of the circle of Stefan George. Klages's irrational vitalism replaced nihilistic negation with the conscious production of myths. His doctrine of consciousness was based on a theory of myths that opposed 'images,' which were living expressions, to 'things,' which were dead creations of the mind.[42] At the centre of Klages's myth-producing vitalism was 'Promethean humanity,' which had sprung out of 'Heraclitean man.' In Jünger's thought, this vitalism assumed a political and modernistic orientation: the 'new man' turned not towards Greek mythology but towards a technological utopia.

Jünger published *Der Arbeiter* in October 1932, three months before Hitler came to power. The subtitle of the work was *Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Domination and form), the *Gestalt* being an ideal type of soldier-worker mentality. Jünger used the concept *Gestalt* in a very similar way to that of the contemporary Berlin school of *Gestalt* psychology, represented by Koffka, Wertheimer and Kohler. He claimed that where socialist propaganda in the nineteenth century had been directed at the workers' 'class-consciousness,' in the twentieth century it ought to be directed at their 'technological consciousness.' Technology was to be co-opted by means of what Jünger called the *'Gestalt* of the worker,' which he regarded as a holistic tool or a mobilizing myth that would serve as a new way of apprehending the modern world.[43]

Gestalt was for Jünger what myth was for Sorel, and *Gestalt* was in fact absolutely mythical: 'In *Gestalt* we refer to the highest meaningful reality. Its appearances are meaningful as symbols, representations and impressions of this reality. The *Gestalt* is the whole which embraces more than the sum of its parts. This "more" we call totality.'[44] Twenty-two years later, in 1955, Heidegger wrote to Jünger that '*Gestalt* is the "source that bestows meaning".'[45] The mythical *Gestalt* representad the

41 G. Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, English transl. by P. Palmer, London 1981, pp. 451–471.

42 L. Klages, *Vom Kosmogonischen Eros*, Munich 1926, p. 79.

43 E. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*, Berlin 1932, p. 12.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

45 M. Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, English transl. by J.T. Wilde and W. Kluback, New Haven 1958, p. 53.
    On the philosophical and political relationship between Jünger and Heidegger,

transition from a decadent liberal society to a new workers' state based on technology — that is, from the physical to the metaphysical. *Gestalt* had no psychological or moral significance and was to be evaluated through the consciousness: it was a means of training human beings to accept certain forms of knowledge irrespective of their will. For Jünger, *Gestalt* was creative form, as opposed to lifeless and repetitious abstract reasoning. It was identified with culture (*Kultur*) and not with civilization (*Zivilization*). Like the futurist 'force-lines' by means of which reality could be interpreted, *Gestalt* was a metaphysical magnet which directed people by means of hidden lines of force.

The vision of *Der Arbeiter* straddled the border between myth and utopia: Hans Peter Schwartz described the book as a 'political myth' in the Sorelian sense, while Gerhard Loose regarded it as a negative utopia or 'utopia of nihilism' which overturned the humanistic assumptions underlying traditional utopias.[46] Karl-Heinz Bohrer saw *Der Arbeiter* as an anti-utopia resembling that of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1926).[47] Jünger was not interested in historical events; for him, the mythical 'phenomenology' embodied in *Der Arbeiter* was the most recent aesthetic representation of the will to power. Where Jünger had once emphasized the 'existential moment' of war, his vision now became one of 'total mobilization,' as state in which labour was unlimited and all individuals could be subjugated to the needs of the whole.[48] The bourgeois world, in contrast to the vitalism of the workers' state, appeared to the myth-producing German intellectuals as a world of security, hypocrisy and self-delusion. The two 'forms' (*Gestalten*), the 'bourgeois' and the 'worker,' were thus presented as opposites, in line with the mythical, antihistorical approach, in which myth negated history: 'The form is the main thing: no development can add to it or subtract from it.'[49] In 1981, Jünger wrote: 'Today, we live in a transitional stage between two immense moments of history, as was the case in the time of Heraclitus. The

see J.-M. Palmier, *Les Écrits politiques de Heidegger*, Paris 1968; and M.E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, Indiana 1990.

46 H.P. Schwartz, *Die konservative Anarchist: Politik und Zeitkritik Ernst Jüngers*, Freiburg 1962; G. Loose, *Ernst Jünger: Gestalt und Werk*, Frankfurt 1957.

47 K.-H. Bohrer, *Die Ästhetic des Schreckens: Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jünger Frühwerk*, Munich 1978.

48 See especially J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, New York–Cambridge, U.K., 1984.

49 D. Ohana, 'Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger: From Nihilism to Totalitarianism,' *History of European Ideas*, XI (1989), pp. 751–758.

latter found himself between two dimensions: on the one side, there was myth, on the other, history. And we, we find ourselves between history and the appearance of something completely different. And our transitional era is characterized by a phase of Titanism which the modern world expresses at all levels.'[50]

By seeking his 'myth *ex nihilo*' on the radical right and the radical left of his period, Jünger, like Sorel, sought to articulate nihilism within the kind of 'organic structure' described by Albert Camus as a 'religion of anti-Christian technique.'[51] Its believers and soldiers were the workers, since they were a universal phenomenon. It was the militant *Gestalt*, not the political content which interested Jünger: 'The more cynical, Spartan, Prussian or Bolshevik life becomes,' he said, 'the better it will be.'[52] In 1925, Jünger had declared that 'National Socialism has more blood and fire in it than the so-called revolution has supplied in all these years.'[53] He did not join the Nazi party, because he utterly rejected the parliamentary system and was disappointed by Hitler's adoption of party tactics. Despite this, however, the Jüngerian myth served as an 'intellectual superstructure' for the Nazi political programme. For Jünger — who obstinately insisted after the Second World War that *Der Arbeiter* had been intended as a diagnosis rather than a prognosis, and that he had functioned merely as a seismograph or barometer of his period — the rise of the Nazis was 'the metaphysical solution, the purely technical execution of total mobilization.'[54]

Jünger was also sympathetic to the German communists of the later 1920s, since he found in them a 'positive, militant will to power.'[55] After despairing of the '*Stahlhelm*,' whose principles resembled those of the French '*Croix-de-Feu*,' Jünger was drawn to the '*Frischer Schill*,' a young '*Bund*' advocating German-Russian co-operation, and he was also associated with the 'Prussian anarchists,' violent militants who were active in the '*Landvolk*' movement in Schleswig-Holstein. At the same time, he saw Italian Fascism and the Soviet Five Year Plan as representing the essence of the new order. The Soviet Union appeared to him to be harder and more determined than the Nazis. He viewed

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50 E. Jünger, 'Le Travailleur: Entretien avec Ernst Jünger,' recorded by Fredrick de Towarnicki, in M. Haar (ed.), *Martin Heidegger*, Paris 1983, p. 149.

51 A. Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, Paris 1951.

52 E. Jünger, 'Die Geburt des Nationalismus aus dem Krieg,' *Deutsches Volkstum*, XI (1929), p. 201.

53 *Die Standarte*, 1 November 1925.

54 J.P. Stern, *Ernst Jünger, A Writer of Our Time*, New York–Cambridge, U.K., 1953, p. 12.

55 Jünger, 'Die Geburt des Nationalismus' (above, note 52), p. 579.

Bolshevism not from the standpoint of Marxist ideology, but as a total mobilization in which technology, more than social struggle, became the 'opium of the masses.'[56] Jünger thus sought in Nazism, National Bolshevism, Italian Fascism and Russian Bolshevism the order which would become the bearer of the myth of the workers' state, based on nihilism, technology, the aesthetics of violence, the *Gestalt* of the worker-warrior and total mobilization.

A comparison of Jünger's mythical approach to history with Wilhelm Dilthey's historical approach is especially interesting. In Dilthey's view, historical relativity leads to a contradiction between the historical approach and the anthropological approach. The significance of transforming history into myth is that the more one 'sees,' the deeper one enters into the concrete. Only 'forms' can penetrate beings and are capable of constructing myths, and this same principle also applies in reverse: wherever there is human historical development, real history loses any vital significance.[57] Klages, Jünger and Heidegger wished to combine myth, authenticity and vitalism in a holistic modern vision. Common to all of them was the idea that the historical process assumes certain forms or types or kinds.

It is not surprising that ideologists of the Third Reich, such as Alfred Bäumler and Ernst Krieck, employed the same vitalistic and mythical language in their opposition to the bourgeoisie. Baeumler, the author of *Nietzsche, Philosopher and Politician* (1931) suggested that intellectuals should train to live the 'life of political warriors' as the form of life most suitable for them. In his work *Myths of the East and West* (1926) Baeumler considered the relationship between myth and history: 'Myth,' he said, 'is definitely unhistorical. Myth not only reaches pre-history, but also attains the human foundations of man's soul.'[58] As an example he took the Jüngerian worker, who became a myth of the modern world — a world which is a workshop, as against the bourgeois world which is a museum. The workshop, analogous to a battlefield, was presented as an aggressive myth of belligerence for its own sake. In the attack on bourgeois culture, creative vitalism combined with irrational nihilism to create a mythical language.

The 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals revolted against the rational tradition of the Enlightenment and gave absolute primacy to myth and

56 J. Norr, 'German Social Theory and the Hidden Face of Technology,' *European Journal of Sociology*, XV (1974), p. 318.
57 W. Dilthey, *Collected Works*, Leipzig–Berlin 1914, VIII, p. 225.
58 A. Baeumler, *Der Mythos vom Orient und Occident*, Munich 1926, p. xc.

to the power of irrational forces. Their fight was directed against the belief in progress with its Marxist, socialist and liberal manifestations. They interpreted these ideologies and western European norms as expressions of the decadence of Europe, which, through its system of parliamentary democracy and its hedonism, had destroyed vital and creative life. Fettered by its past or, alternatively, by the illusions of progress, and irrevocably poisoned by the falsehood of its bourgeois tradition, Europe was dying and could be saved only by a new political myth. Modern technology, which they admired, provided the means of making order out of chaos and gave them a new romantic myth, serving the politics of violence.

The importance of this intellectual current lies in its fabrication of a modern political mythology which inspired intellectuals, politicians and leaders of mass movements. It created a new terminology or political dictionary of modernism, based on such key concepts as 'new man,' 'political myth,' 'dynamism,' and 'will to power.' This new style signified a transition from the centrality of ideology to the centrality of myth. It became the heart of a dynamic political culture which created the 'generation of 1914' and influenced the various totalitarian ideologies that arose in its wake.

Michela Nacci

The Present as Nightmare:
Cultural Pessimism among European Intellectuals
in the Period between the Two World Wars

The years between the two world wars were a difficult time for
democracy in Europe, not only because of the rise of authoritarian
regimes, but also because of the general lack of credibility afflicting
the theory and practice of democracy in that period. This is only
indirectly demonstrable with regard to the masses; for example, it
is debatable whether the 'consensus' undoubtedly enjoyed by Italian
Fascism derived from the people's active consent to an authoritarian
system, or merely from their passive acceptance of a lesser evil, or from
the actual coercion of their attitudes and behavior. But intellectuals
speak, write, determine opinion, influence the attitudes of others, and
above all leave deep impressions of their thoughts and reflections.
What so arrests us whenever we examine this issue, apart from the
heritage of ideas left by the most prominent European intellectuals of
the time, is how low an opinion they had of democracy and liberalism.

Of course, it is impossible to assign a single character to that era:
alongside the pro-Fascists were the leftist intellectuals, and some of the
period's great writings are by authors sincerely committed to liberal
democratic values. But if the picture requires a more subtle shading
and the various positions a greater differentiation, the fact remains that
liberal democratic governments were generally held in low esteem.
On rereading essays written at the time and reflecting upon it, we
are frequently struck by disaffection for democracy, violent invective
against liberalism, criticisms of the philistine spirit that had supposedly
infested every area of traditional politics, and expressions of sympathy
for the Fascist and Nazi regimes. Authoritarian, conservative and
reactionary tendencies prevailed, even among eminent intellectuals.

I shall examine only a part of this complex panorama, excluding
the openly Fascist, rightist intellectuals. I shall treat, instead, the 'free
spirits' who operated in Europe, the intellectuals *au dessus de la melée* and

their difficult relationship with democracy, as reflected in their analyses of their situation, their expressed fears or hopes, and their attempts to define their epoch. Particularly interesting in this regard are the more pessimistic observations, the bleakest thoughts, the most anxious diagnoses. While we cannot claim that optimism had disappeared altogether from the minds of these intellectuals, we note how contrary attitudes — fear, discontent, resignation in the face of evil — were more widespread and resounding.

My aim is to trace a link between two widespread attitudes: the cultural pessimism that saw the present as a nightmare, and disaffection with democracy. My guiding hypothesis is that the intellectuals who displayed these attitudes derived their notions and authoritarian tendencies from the image of their epoch as decadent and terminal in the history of civilization. This image, abstract and equivocal, crops up repeatedly at moments of crisis in contemporary history. An important aspect of it had to do with the social status of the intellectual in the modern world. The frightening transformations in the role played by cultured individuals often influenced their diagnoses of a world headed for imminent disaster, their condemnations and their proposals for solution.

It is precisely the role crisis experienced by those intellectuals who were not integrated into the authoritarian regimes that heightens their significance: they more markedly show their uneasiness about their position in a world undergoing profound change. Also, by examining their critique of their time and their search for remedies to the decline of civilization, we can see how much these uncommitted intellectuals actually had in common with the true Fascist intellectuals who supported the regimes, and arrive at an understanding of how so many of them came to embrace arguments supporting disaffection with liberal, democratic governments.

This paper addresses four issues: (1) the perception shared by intellectuals between the two wars of an epochal crisis; (2) their critiques of the idea of progress and their proposals for alternative explanations of history; (3) their critiques of mass civilization; and (4) their authoritarian inclinations.

The Present as Nightmare

'What beginning can there be in the end?' wondered Hermann Broch at the close of a 1916 essay.[1] The end to which he referred was none other

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1   H. Broch, *Notizen zu einer systematischen Aesthetick*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, VI, Zürich

than that of Western civilization. In that essay, Broch dealt with the death of style, and argued in a rather Spenglerian manner that any art declines and perishes when it passes from a 'primitive' to a 'rational' style. For him, as for others, the sign of an exhausted culture was the disappearance of spontaneity and the appearance of knowledge, of rational reflection. Broch saw this as a recurring historical phenomenon, but added:

> This time ... it will all come about in a more radical manner. Not only a style is about to end, but an entire civilization. ... The white man's civilization had its particular geographical mission which has now drawn to a close. For two thousand years this culture has become constantly more rational without becoming more profound, in order to fulfill its geographical mision which now has been accomplished. ... Nothing else is left. The traffic, gone wild, will circle around an already overly explored earth, like an aimless energy, constantly more hysterical; the skyscrapers rise pointlessly toward the heavens, the locomotive runs off its tracks into the night, toward nothing.[2]

Unease with the age, malaise, a sense of suffocation, of a dead end, of estrangement from world events and trends — all these were typical not only of particularly misanthropic authors or discouraging moments, but of a wide assortment of intellectuals throughout the period. What is more, disgust for the epoch in which one was condemned to live, or, in another version, the fears generated by that epoch, contributed to a broad diagnosis of the age as a time of crisis, decline or finality — the decline of Western civilization. This diagnosis took on various names and varying features from one author to another, but it remained distinctly recognizable: for Paul Valéry it was 'the crisis of the spirit,' for Oswald Spengler 'the decline of the West,' for René Guénon 'the crisis of the modern world,' for Sigmund Freud 'civilization's discontents,' for Hermann Broch 'the breakdown of values,' for Stefan Zweig 'the end of the golden age of security.'

The very name of Spengler evokes the phenomenon to which we are referring. From the very moment it appeared, his *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* was much more than just a successful book. The term 'Spenglerism' has since become synonymous with cultural pessimism,

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1960; Italian translation in *Il kitsch*, Turin 1990, p. 24. Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations of the works quoted herein are by the author.

2   *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 32.

apolcalyptic thought and catastrophism, as well as with a kind of historical synthesizing that has little regard for historiographic rigor. In this work, Spengler set forth his criticism of linear evolution, his cyclical explanation of the historical process, and his conceptualization of civilizations as organisms that are born, grow to maturity and die. In Spengler's great historical construction, founded on the idea of declines and rebirths, the present epoch was assessed as one of history's numerous examples of the breakdown and extinction of a civilization. Not only was such a process conceivable in the abstract; it was happening, now, in the West. The eclipse of the individual by the state, the dominance of technology, politics, the big city, money, the middle class, the analytical spirit and rationalism — all these were signs of decline.

Notwithstanding Spengler's prominence in this regard, it is interesting to note that the discovery of civilization's finitude was made simultaneously by more than one author. The same intuitions and diagnoses that informed Spengler's conceptualization influenced many other intellectuals, and the specific signs of the decline of the West became the central themes elaborated by contemporary observers of the period.

Paul Valéry wrote in 1919: 'We, civilization, now know we are mortal.'[3] For him, as for many others, the First World War had the effect of making timely the legends of the fall of ancient civilizations. The record of ruined cultures was transformed from curious tale to explicative model in the history of civlization. The circumstances of the fall of Babylonia were the same as what one could read about in the newspapers.

But those who formulated these catastrophic reflections on the contemporary age did not limit themselves to rendering the distant past timely for the immediate present, to inevitably anachronistic effect. They took pains to analyze the internal texture of civilizations, discovering them to be elusive phenomena indeed. Valéry wrote: 'We maintain that a civilization has the same fragility as a life.'[4] Not only did the civilization of the European West seem threatened, but the very emergence and stabilization of civilization in general seemed purely fortuitous. As Julien Benda wrote in his well-known *La Trahison des clercs*, in a tenor analogous to Valéry's: 'Civilization as I understand it

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3   P. Valéry, 'La crise de l'esprit' (1919), in *Variété*, Paris 1924, p. 11.
4   *Ibid*.

here — the moral primacy conferred on the cult of spiritual treasures and the sense of the universal — seems to me, in the development of man, merely a happy accident.'[5] As he saw it, history was characterized far more by lengthy spans of obscurantism (which for Benda was synonymous with irrationalism) than by enlightened epochs like the Hellenic age. The past showed that civilization was the exception rather than the rule, not a reality inevitably linked to the human species, but a difficult, painstaking acquisition always on the verge of being lost. Moreover, in contrast to Spengler and his fellow believers in historical cyclicity, Benda was convinced that a civilization, once lost, could not be regained. Rebirths of civilization were chance events, and rare at that. If the exponents of the cyclicity theory could at least believe that deaths were followed by rebirths, the advocates of casuality had no conceptual foothold, no certainty about what might follow the end.

It bears noting in this connection that even Freud's two famous essays, *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, share not only the same fears and bleak diagnoses of the contemporary situation, but also the conviction that civilization (a term Freud used in a very different sense than Benda's) is acquired so arduously by humankind that it must be protected from humanity's own tendencies to boredom and weariness. 'It is necessary, in my opinion,' he wrote, 'to appreciate the fact that all men harbor tendencies that are destructive and therefore antisocial and hostile to civilization, and that in a great number of individuals these tendencies are strong enough to influence behaviour in human society.'[6]

Spengler's own influence was widespread and extended even to his detractors. Albert Einstein wrote to Max Born in 1920: 'Spengler hasn't spared even me. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, it's easy to let him get the best of you, only to laugh about it the next day.'[7] Spengler's name, invariably accompanied by a touch of suspicion and condescension, was a hallmark of the age of cultural pessimism, a distinctive sign marking one's spiritual paternity; one might be a bit ashamed of it, but it was undeniably a formative influence.

Spengler was accused of using analogy too freely, of forcing historical events to fit his theory, of predicting developments that failed to

5   J. Benda, *La Trahison des clercs*, Paris 1927; Italian translation, Turin 1976, p. 192.
6 ˙ S. Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, Leipzig 1927; Italian translation: *Il disagio della civiltà e altri saggi*, Turin 1971, p. 147. The essay *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* was published in 1930.
7   A. Einstein, H. Born & M. Born, *Briefwechsel 1916–1955*; Italian translation, Turin 1973, p. 28

come about and of being, at bottom, an optimist for declaring that civilizations are reborn by iron necessity. Nevertheless, he was given credit for having reawakened European minds from the optimistic torpor into which they had fallen. If he had predicted wrongly, his merit lay in the very attempt to predict, in his demonstration that the future of Western civilization was a problem, and an agonizing one. On this point, between the two wars, many were agreed.

The perception of a crisis involving an entire epoch, the theme of *finis Europae*, the prediction of an apocalypse which would put an end to Western civilization, the sense of the decline of a world, of man's benign inventions being transformed into his ruin, of ends perverted by their means, of a divergence of material from spiritual progress — in all these, Spengler resembled the intellectuals of the age, perhaps more closely than some may have wished. What is certain is that analogous forms of culture despair[8] were strikingly characteristic of the intellectual life of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe. We shall cite only a few of the numerous examples.

Albert Schweitzer wrote in 1923: 'Today we are living under the signs of the collapse of civilization. This is not a consequence of the war; on the contrary, the war was just a symptom of it.'[9] Writing when he was already in Africa (one of the many to flee civilization in those years[10]), Schweitzer accused philosophy of not having reflected sufficiently on the vital problems of mankind, of having abdicated, with positivism, its basic function. Numerous perils threatened modern humanity in a world preoccupied with history and economics: dehumanization, the overemphasis of material progress, the rise of a mass mentality, big-city life.

A similar view was endorsed by Nicolai Berdyayev: 'Today we begin to witness the barbarization of the European world. ... Twilight is falling on Europe. European societies are entering into a period of old age and transitoriness.'[11] Berdyayev repeatedly compares his time with that of the fall of the Roman Empire, and here, too, the signs of the end have

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8 Cf. F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1961.

9 A. Schweitzer, *Verfall und Wiederaufbau der Kultur*, Bern 1923; Italian translation, Milan 1963, p. 17; English translation, London 1923.

10 On the theme of literary or actual escape in those years cf. S. Teroni (ed.), *L'occhio del viaggiatore, Scrittori Francesi degli anni trenta*, Florence 1985; P. Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars*, Oxford 1980; E.J. Lead, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*, 1991.

11 N. Berdyayev, *Un Nouveau Moyen Age*, Paris 1927, p. 72.

a familiar ring: materialism, empty intellectualism, the resurgence of pagan cults, the deification of the state.

Johan Huizinga observed:

> We are living in an obsessed world. And we know it. No one would be astonished if, one fine day, this dementedness of ours erupted into a crisis of utter madness which, once having spent itself, would leave Europe obtuse and disoriented; the motors would continue to hum and the flags to wave, but the spirit would be dead.[12]

And again:

> The prospect of a civilization which continues to carry on has long inspired the anxious question: is not the cultural development we are witnessing rather a process of barbarization?[13]

Huizinga was appalled by the urban spirit he saw coming into being in cities like New York, which seemed the ideal terrain for the mass reactions he found so terrifying. The shift from an agricultural, hierarchical, cohesive society to an industrial, atomistic, egalitarian one was in his eyes the most disastrous paradox of modern times. Birth control by scientific means and the general utilization of science for destructive purposes seemed to him a perfect example of the heterogenesis of ends. Democracy was meritorious only to the extent that it was tempered with elitism: left to itself, it favored the emergence of modern mass dictatorships, or of that dominion of the massified mentality which frustrated the intentions of the most perfect governments.

Of course, the barbarization Huizinga saw emerging before his eyes was very different from the thundering end of civilization described by Spengler. Where Spengler, from his German perspective, had predicted ever greater mechanization, a predominance of utility and power, the Dutch historian was careful to emphasize that 'the sensation of nearing an end' derived from the abandonment of reason, the puerilism prevalent among men and nations, in short, the 'civilization' depicted by Spengler 'plus a good dose of dementedness, charlatanism and cruelty, mixed with a sentimentalism that [Spengler] did not foresee.'[14]

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12 J. Huizinga, *In de schaduwen van morgen, een diagnoes van het geestelijk lijden van onzen tijd*, 1935; Italian translation, Turin 1962, p. 3; English translation, London–Toronto 1936.
13 *Ibid.*, Italian translation, p. 138.
14 *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

Nevertheless, an attentive reading of Huizinga will discern a broad agreement on the specific signs of decline that Spengler had identified.

One of the forms of decline described in the Spenglerian historical morphology was the recurrent passage from *Kultur* to *Zivilisation*. For Spengler, *Zivilisation* was the most external and artificial stage of the human species, the end product of the process of becoming, death following life, senility following old age, mechanism following organism. Such a shift took place in the fourth century, and again in the nineteenth. This stage of civilization was characterized by the growth of big cities, the disunity of peoples and the rise of the rootless individual, the disappearance of tradition and religion, a decline in the birth rate, the triumph of intellect, practicality and materialism, the affirmation of science and utilitarianism, the oblivion of the unconscious, and, lastly, democracy.[15]

In addition to the tendency to rationalism (which Spengler saw as an evil to be condemned and Huizinga as a good thing which unfortunately was being lost), many more features of Spenglerian *Zivilisation* were cited by other authors as signs of the time of decline in which they were living.

In 1914, Thomas Mann wrote:

> Culture signifies unity, style, form, decorum, taste; it is a certain spiritual organization of the world, even when that world is thoroughly adventurous, scurrilous, wild, bloody, frightening. Culture can combine oracle, magic, pederasty, cannibalism, orgiastic cults, inquisition, *auto-da-fé*, St. Vitus' dance, witch trials, a rage of poisonings and the most varied cruelties. Civilization is instead reason, enlightenment, calm, restraint, composure, scepticism, clarification ... spirit. Yes, spirit is civil, it is bourgeois; it is the sworn enemy of the instincts, of the passions, it is anti-demoniacal, anti-heroic, and it is only an apparent contradiction in terms when we affirm that it is also anti-genius.[16]

This distinction between, on the one hand, culture, which is by nature profundity and perchance cruelty, incarnating itself in music, religion and philosophy, and, on the other hand, the bourgeois mediocrity of

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15 In this connection, Spengler notes that the same concept of democracy 'goes hand in hand with an exclusively machine-based, urban existence.' Cf. the Italian translation of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Milan 1970, p. 550.

16 T. Mann, *Gedanken im Kriege*, 1914; Italian translation in *Scritti storici e politici*, Milan 1957, p. 35.

pacifist, humanitarian, democratic, enlightened civilization, informs other essays by Mann from this period, above all his *Bertrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. It also constitutes the philosophical framework of *The Magic Mountain*, in the clash between Naphta, representing culture, and Settembrini, the mouthpiece of civilization.

The Illusion of Progress

Mann's Naphta is characterized, among other things, by his hatred of democracy and the bourgeois spirit, which he defines as 'the revolutionary of conservation.' One of Settembrini's principal beliefs, by contrast, is in progress. This association of *Zivilisation* — that is, the world's decline — with historical optimism, with faith in the ever-greater civilization of humanity, was held in common by the exponents of the culture of crisis between the two wars. All of them contributed arguments against this linear, progressive vision of history.

The Enlightenment saw the convergence of progress in all fields (especially the arts and sciences) as eventuating in the civil and moral improvement of humankind and, through the civilizing of savage peoples, envisioned the participation of the entire world in that march forward. According to the various nineteenth-century versions of the idea, and above all that of positivism, which left the longest-lasting impression on posterity, progress depended on the development of industry and the expanding capabilities of science and technology. Industry was a source of wealth and stable social organization, while science and technology were naturally good means of dominating nature and defeating backwardness and disease. Of course, not everyone in the eighteenth and nineteeenth centuries was convinced of humanity's 'magnificent and progressive' future; critical voices were not lacking even then. But, in the aftermath of the unprecedented destructiveness of the First World War, and in the face of the grim potential evinced by its weaponry, surviving humanity now formed an image of the preceding period in which the idea of progress itself bore an overriding stigma of naiveté and facile optimism.

Those who had seen the horrors and devastation wrought by technology now associated material progress and industrial development with rampant folly and social disintegration. Progress was no longer seen as continuous, infinite and all-embracing; it was, rather, a process limited in space and time and linked to specific fields of production or research. Ultimately, it was dissociated altogether from overarching world developments: from being preceived as the

driving force of industrialism and the philosophy behind it, progress was reduced to a matter of individual perfectionism and ethical ideals. Often nothing remained of the original idea of progress except the aspiration to inner perfection, or the conviction that it was necessary to save oneself from a 'progress-ridden' world. Cultural pessimism did see the present as being characterized by progress — but it was an aberrant, negative progress.

Spengler wrote in 1918:

> A thoroughly absurd method of historical interpretation is the kind adopted by one who, by giving free reign to his own political, religious and social prejudices, that is, to the three phases,[17] which he dares not alter one whit, provides just the slant that leads them up to where he stands, imposing case by case, as the absolute measure of millennia of history, the sovereignty of reason, humanitarianism, the welfare of the greatest number, economic evolution, enlightenment, the freedom of peoples, the subjection of nature, world peace and so forth, and undertaking to demonstrate that those millennia simply did not comprehend or know how to reach what they ought to, while in reality they just wanted different things from what we want.[18]

The point was that humanity, taken as a whole, was not progressing toward some ultimate, ideal finality. Rather, humanity was divided into multiple civilizations; each experienced a specific kind of progress, whose fruits were not everlasting but came to naught with the death of the historical organism in which they had developed. History therefore always recommenced from the beginning, even if this eternal recommencement had an element of superhistorical permanence. The phases of the birth and death of every civilization followed a necessary order which the historian could only record. Progress was characterized not only by the fragility of its acquisitions but also by the fatalism of a cyclical movement that was ineluctable, recurrent and always the same.

Of the elements of Spengler's concept that so struck his contemporaries, his explicit or implicit criticism of the idea of progress must have been especially important. Rejecting the notion of a unique, eternal, cumulative civilization, he pointed to the existence of multiple civilizations with ephemeral accomplishments; to the mortality of

17 Spengler was referring here to the Antiquity–Middle Ages–Modern Age scheme.
18 Spengler, *Der Untergang* (above, note 15), p. 60.

refined and powerful cultures; and to a naturalistic concept of civilization. With the West located squarely in a phase of decline, he prophesied a Europe crushed beneath the weight of non-European peoples with higher birth rates, making disciplined use of a technology the West itself had bestowed on them. All of these were suggestive themes, emphasizing highly disquieting signs that favoured cultural pessimism.

The unity thus denied the idea of progress made a strange reappearance in the 'mystical' concept of history espoused by Broch as part of his critique of linear evolutionism. Broch believed that each historical epoch is an organic unit with its own soul, a unique, transient style that defines and expresses it. Only on the basis of a strongly unitary concept, defining history as a whole, is it possible to determine the end of an epoch. But though Broch's new conceptualization of historical totality enjoyed a certain moment of prestige, it hardly troubled Spengler's sleep, or that of his fellow critics of progress.

Huizinga wrote:

> Spengler's *Decline of the West* functioned throughout the world as an alarm signal. This does not mean that every reader of that famous book was converted to his views. But it familiarized them with his thought of the possibility of a decline of our present-day civilization, while before they were still swaddled in an unquestioned faith in progress. ... It would be very instructive to be able to see expressed in a graph the rapidity with which the word 'progress' has vanished from use throughout the world.[19]

Huizinga wedded the belief that all civilizations are condemned to break down to a contempt for 'the terminal century's happy illusion,' according to which the division of labor, increased literacy, the diffusion of information, medical breakthroughs and increased scientific knowledge would make possible a perfect social harmony.

Another great historical synthesis launched in those years, initially less popular but of more lasting influence in the long run, is that laid out by Arnold Toynbee in *A Study of History*. 'The problem of the fall of civilizations is clearer than the problem of their development,'[20] Toynbee asserted. Based on a challenge–response mechanism, the blueprint for the development of civilizations offered by the English

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19 Huizinga, *In de schaduwen* (above, note 12), Italian translation, p. 6.
20 A. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, New York 1934–1961; Italian translation, Rome 1974, p. 248.

historian was actually more complex than Spengler's. In his vision, civilizations as they evolved and died formed the spokes of a kind of imperceptibly turning wheel. The nature of the fall of civilizations could be described in three successive phases: first, the creative energy of the minority wanes; then, the majority stops imitating the creative minorities (mimesis); and finally the society loses its social unity. The unitary notion of history, according to which the flow of the various civilizations is one, could be traced, in his view, to three illusions: the egocentric illusion, which sees all histories culminating in the history of the present world in which one lives; the illusion of an immutable Orient; and the illusion of progress. As for the last, notwithstanding the subtler nuances of his thesis, Toynbee wrote:

> The illusion of progress as something which proceeds in a straight line is an example of that tendency to over-simplification which the human mind displays in all its activities. In their 'periodizations' our historians dispose their periods in a single series end to end, like the sections of a bamboo stem between joint and joint or the sections of the patent extensible handle on the end of which an up-to-date modern chimney-sweep pokes his brush up the flue.[21]

Some of the exponents of cultural pessimism believed that progress was simply more uncertain and laborious than the theoreticians of progress allowed. They frequently distinguished between ·material progress and spiritual progress, maintaining that the two could not happen simultaneously; on the contrary, the first stifled the second. Elsewhere, however, the rejection of progress was given a more overarching explanation, as in the case of René Guénon's theory of the progressive breakdown of civilization following upon a 'solar beginning.' Drawing upon Hindu doctrine, Guénon divided each of the cycles of man's life on earth into four ages, which were four progressive darkenings of the primitive spirit. The world was now in the fourth age, that of extreme darkness, and would most likely soon come to an end, unless a sudden upset should enable civilization to make a comeback upon a more elevated plane. In the dark age, only the experimental sciences and their practical applications had any validity, but they themselves might be the cause of civilization's final collapse. According to Guénon, the discoveries of the modern age and its greatest boast, science, were the fruits of pre-existing beliefs, though these beliefs pertained not to progress but rather to

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21 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

an ongoing process of degeneration. They were fragments which had been detached from the wholeness of knowledge that had contained them, demonstrating once again the march of time for the worse, the progressive materialization of all things.

As Georges Friedmann wrote in 1936, in a rather dated but still important essay, the idea of progress in its golden age was viewed as one with science and democracy. All three were lasting conquests that would bring peace, improvement, well-being and justice to humanity. Friedmann noted how these ideals, typical of the socialist parties and the enlightened middle class of the late nineteenth century, had all fallen together into discredit, surviving only in the Communist Parties in the West and in Socialist Russia. Friedmann was a faithful fellow-traveller,[22] but his observation was accurate enough: in the new climate of cultural pessimism, attacks upon democracy were in keeping with the criticisms lodged against science and technology, and found a niche more easily where the idea of progress had lost its hold.

The Barbarity of Mass Civilization

If we try to name the objects of the period's intellectual apprehension or derision, we can find many: modernity, material progress, the end of European hegemony, the greater vitality of coloured peoples, the growing importance of the United States, the application of optimism to history, and so forth. While each of these elements of fear of the future has its own validity in the intellectual life of the period, there is a single term which unites them all, and also serves to define what was so repellent, in the consciousness of many intellectuals, about the present.

'Mass civilization' was a phenomenon already described by the most prominent historians and sociologists of the time, under the rubric of 'mass society': a society in which the masses participate — and claim the right to do so — ever more in activities once reserved for elites, from politics to production, from the military to sport. But the tide of cultural pessimism assigned wider and weightier ramifications and more complex roots to this perceived democratization of life. 'Mass civilization' came to signify the barbarization of customs, the homogenization of behavior, political demagoguery and the effort to generate consensus by means of propaganda, the standardization of products, men and ideas, the death of art and the reign of quantity.

22 G. Friedmann, *La crise du progrès: Essai d'histoire des idées, 1895–1935*, Paris 1936.

The source of these catastrophic developments was industrial society itself, which paved the way for a terrible, overwhelming conformity in human society. Industrialism represented a *de facto* incentive towards democracy, understood not as a political system but in the sense used by Tocqueville in describing America: 'democracy as a way of life.'

T.S. Eliot stated in 1939:

> The more highly industrialized the country, the more easily a materialist philosophy will flourish in it, and the more deadly that philosophy will be. Britain has been highly industrialized longer than any other country. And the tendency of unlimited industrialism is to create bodies of men and women — of all classes — detached from tradition, alienated from religion and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. And a mob will be no less a mob if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed and well disciplined.[23]

The whole school of cultural pessimism concurred on this point. This emphatic anti-industrialism also appeared as the dominant motif where the apprehension of a crisis of Western civilization was integrated with authoritarian tendencies, manifested so persistently by so many.

A central element in Albert Schweitzer's diagnosis of the decline of Western civilization refers to the highly touted material conquests of the contemporary world: 'If on the one hand,' he writes, 'they make men less dependent on nature, on the other they reduce the number of free and independent individuals.'[24] The shift from handicrafts to industrial production had reduced freedom and the ability to think. Excessive fatique, loss of unity and of the spiritual value of work, alienation from the soil and nature, life in oversized conglomerates, the hyper-organization of society: all these were elements which, according to Schweitzer, would engender a mass mentality; these were reasons for affirming that civilization should be saved from 'progress,' from the big city and the urban spirit. 'Modern man,' wrote Schweitzer,

> gets lost in the mass in a way that is unprecedented in history: this is perhaps his chief feature. Lack of concentration makes him receptive, almost to a pathological degree, to the opinions which society and its organs of expression put into circulation

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23 T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, London 1939; Italian translation, Milan 1948, p. 37.
24 A. Schweitzer, *Verfall und Wiederaufbau* (above, note 9), Italian translation, p. 35.

ready-made. ... He is like a rubber ball that has lost its resiliency and conserves every shape that is imprinted on it. He is dependent on the mass and draws from it the opinions on which he bases his life, whether these are furnished by national or political groups, by faith or by skepticism.[25]

Among the condemnations of mass civilization and of the standardized man who was its product and champion, *La Rebelión de las masas* by José Ortega y Gasset stands on a level with Spengler's *Decline* in its apocalyptic predictions for the West. This 1930 pamphlet long suffered the fate of being treated as a literary symbol — whether interpreted as an anticipation of Fascism or as a libertarian outcry against the gagging of free thought — rather than as a text to be read with care. It dealt with the most outstanding anthropological mutation of recent times: the transformation of the thinking individual, a creation of the modern world and of liberalism, into mass man. Ortega specifies that the hero of his text has no clear class characteristics, but, rather, belongs to the spiritual category of the petite bourgeoisie. His description of this human being who lives in a middling state of well-being, wishes to be like everybody else, thinks only in stereotypes, is well-informed and at the same time ignorant, and does everything his peer group does, was a perfect portrait — and as such, it greatly struck his contemporaries — of the mobs in mass societies, the anonymous inhabitants of the metropolis.

In another, lesser-known essay, Ortega wrote:

> For the past two generations European life has been tending doward de-individualization. Everything is forcing man to lose his uniqueness and to become less solid. ... It is a fact that lately many Europeans are taking great pleasure in ceasing to be individuals and in blending into the collectivity. There is an epidemic delight in feeling oneself part of the mass, in not having an exclusive destiny. Man is getting socialized. ... The socialization of man is a frightening destiny.[26]

Reflecting on the origin of the fearful potency of the collectivity that reduces men to sheep, Ortega concluded that its origins lay in liberal democracy, the scientific experience and industrialism. Other prophets

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25 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
26 J. Ortega y Gasset, 'La socialización del hombre,' in idem, *El Espectador*, Madrid 1930; Italian translation, Milan 1949–1960, II, p. 346.

of crisis took a similar view: in warning of the possible collapse of Western civilization because of the reigning barbarity of standardized men, they, too, evoked on the one hand the creation of a civilization of machines, and on the other the failure of nineteenth-century liberalism, which had surrendered precipitously to a levelling democracy (so precipitously as to make one think it already contained the seeds of this massification). The beautiful democratic ideals of equality, literacy, universal suffrage, and ever wider participation in political life had been transformed into the 'rebellion of the masses,' an indiscriminate flattening of roles and nullification of values.

For the reactionaries among these intellectuals, the process that led from liberal democracies to mass regimes where the collectivity reigned could not be reversed in a way that allowed for continuity; the resulting regimes were already infested with total democratization. For those who, on the contrary, had seen elitist liberalism as the best attainable form of regime and believed in the possiblity of democracy, this headlong fall of the European states into an identical mass society demonstrated their grave incapactiy to channel the forces erupting from society's lowest strata, revealing an intrinsic flaw in the principles of those regimes.

A key notion in these pessimistic considerations was thus the idea that industrial society by its very nature was the first step toward a full-fledged mass civilization. This thesis comes through in the excerpt from Eliot quoted above, and it was, as we saw, a firm conviction of Ortega's. The thesis that every civilization based on machines destroyed values that were indispensable to a harmonious social life, that factory work was deleterious for producers and consumers alike, that consumer society represented a terrible threat to a people's ideals — in short, that at the roots of contemporary mass collectivism lay J.P. Taylor and Henry Ford — stands out as a common chord in the denunciations and invectives of those who predicted or feared the march of collectivism in Europe.

This viewpoint was the most radically pessimistic of them all, since industrialism was a widespread reality throughout the West. Only by way of the most violent expression of their desires could the critics of mass civilization hope to turn back the clock, to wipe out industrial progress and assembly-line production, the production and purchase of vast amounts of standardized consumer goods by people who more and more resembled one another.

Moreover, it was precisely this viewpoint that could spawn the idea that the most terrible, restrictive and liberty-destroying dictatorship

was that which was growing gradually out of mass societies, with their abundance of riches and formal freedoms. Eliot wrote:

> Or we might get a 'totalitarian democracy,' ... a state of affairs in which we shall have regimentation and conformity, without respect for the needs of the individual soul; the puritanism of a hygienic morality in the interest of efficiency; uniformity of opinion though propaganda, and art encouraged when it flatters the official doctrines of the time.[27]

The opinion expressed here by the great Anglo-American poet is identical to that of the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, who delared that liberalism dug liberty's grave. Both, hardly by chance, were intellectuals who still lived and worked in the heartland of liberalism, though they had lost every hope in its vitality, its capacity to transform itself and its power to resist the entry of the masses onto the public scene. Eliot stated: 'Liberalism can prepare the way for that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanized, brutalized control which is a desperate remedy for its chaos.'[28]

The worst of it was that this control would not be imposed from without, would not be the insane initiative of some power-hungry tyrant. The forces that labored for despotism were the same as those that guided the development of mass society. They brought about the dissolution of the collective consciousness and, by the same token, the destruction of a people's traditions. Freedom was conceded to all opinions and therefore even to the most senseless; instruction was substituted for education; skill was encouraged over wisdom; and all forms of art and culture were debased, leading to what Eliot called 'the chaos of ideals and the confusion of thought.' Appeals to the masses, through advertising in peacetime and through propaganda in wartime and in politics, always utilized those instruments that spoke to the most vulgar and emotional parts of the human spirit.

It was from this same perspective that cinema and household gadgets could be lumped together as the consummate products of industrial society. Genius in the service of utility, the substitution of the machine for the human hand and the end of art — these were the far-reaching consequences for which the prophets of crisis held those inventions responsible. The denunciations that cinema inspired in authors like Hermann Hesse and contemporary observers like Georges Duhamel

27 T.S. Eliot, *The Idea* (above, note 23), Italian translation, p. 32.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

are comprehensible only within this context. Hesse saw in the movies 'the most horrendous and obtuse products that can be found in the way of surrogates for art and false drama.' He was disgusted by their atmosphere, which he saw as physically and morally depraved, by 'that atrocious music,' 'those idiotic subtitles,' 'that horsey laughter' of the masses of spectators.[29] Duhamel spoke of collective hysteria and the decay of intellect, of 'intestinal laughter,' of pleasures savoured in the shadows; and he cried murder — the murder of art in a mass society, obviously.[30] The 'Steppenwolf' in whom Hesse projected his revulsion for the modern world exclaimed, in an extreme, all-embracing judgement of mass civilization:

> Oh, it is difficult to find a trace of divinity in the midst of the life we lead, in such a satisfied, bourgeois time as this, so lacking in spirit, with the sight of this architecture, these shops, this politics, this humanity! ... I cannot stay for long in a theatre or cinema, I hardly manage to read a newspaper, and rarely read a modern book, I don't understand what pleasure people find in crowded railway trains and hotels, in packed cafés where they play raucous, asphyxiating music, in bars and burlesque houses of smart luxurious cities, in world expositions, conferences for lovers of culture, mammoth sports arenas... .[31]

This description echoes the opening pages of *La Rebelión de las masas* and Duhamel's description of the future world already here. As Duhamel expounded, 'A society that has been exposed to industrialism for two centuries is heading for the worst kind of decadence.'[32]

The ubiquity of household gadgets made it apparent that the human species was no longer capable of modifying itself advantageously and was compensating for this inability by inventing artificial means of adaptation, thus condemning itself to an existence from which any effort at all, even a pleasurable one, would be banned. Since the next logical step in this negative utopia was the invention of the robot, human beings were in a fair way to being transformed into impotent dominators, at the service of their machines — a vision that effectively sums up the fears of the prophets of crisis.

It is on the basis of this same notion of industrial society as the true engine of collectivism that Europe, already developed into an integral

29 H. Hesse, *Kurgast*, Berlin 1925; Italian translation, Milan 1978, p. 97.
30 G. Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future*, Paris 1930, p. 152.
31 H. Hesse, *Der Steppenwolf*, Berlin 1927; Italian translation, Milan 1972, p. 85.
32 Duhamel, *Scènes* (above, note 30), p. 87.

mass society, could be likened not only to Bolshevist Russia, with its heroized, tyrannical masses, but also to the America of consumerism, newspapers and electoral extravaganzas. Indeed, it was the latter rather than the former that seemed the truer incarnation of collectivism and anonymity. America was a perfect representation of Europe's future cast, since, in Duhamel's words, 'no nation has yet yielded itself more deliberately than the United States to the excesses of industrial civilization.'[33] The New World was accomplishing something even more frightening than communist political collectivism: to wit, a social collectivism from which it was well-nigh impossible to escape. To the extent that Europe was becoming a mass civilization, it was becoming Americanized.

Thus, one of the less direct but equally significant forms by which fears about the fate of society were expressed in those years was by way of violent attacks upon 'Americanization.' A nation whose modernity inclined toward the fully developed American form was no more than a human aggregate, no longer held together by a tradition, a common history, or a sense of solidarity or belonging. Over this atomized mass of nullified individuals loomed the power of a state bureaucracy that had lost any useful purpose, but was begged by its own people to become powerful and oppressive.

For some, this process characterized the whole modern epoch. Among these was Berdyayev, who wrote in 1923:

> Modern man isolates himself, and when he transforms himself into an isolated atom he is overwhelmed by a sense of inexpressible terror from which he seeks to escape by joining collectivities, with the purpose of overcoming and putting a stop to the loneliness and abandonment that threaten him with perdition and spiritual and material starvation. This atomization and its effects give birth to the process of conversion to collectivism, to the attempt by mankind to create a new principle through which to escape from its loneliness.[34]

For others, the interrelated spread of social atomization and collectivism, the emergence, not necessarily by coercion, of thrusts toward regimentation was related to more recent changes and to a

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33 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
34 N. Berdyayev, *Smyl istorii* (The sense of history, 1923), Italian translation, Milan 1971, p. 129.

narrower idea of modernity. The principal culprit, in all events, was industrialism, which annihilated culture and levelled mankind. For the rest, if we enquire into the cause of what Benda described as the *clerc*'s transformation into an intellectual in the service of a group, the answer lies in the cancellation of all differences between the intellectual and the rest of society, a development that could only occur in a world that put production above every other requisite and demanded that the intellectual produce, enlist in the service of practical appetites, and give the world its due.

The philosopher Karl Jaspers, in his reflections on the contemporary age, affirmed that the technological world is one of mediocre men devoid of historical memory, of any real contact with things, and of any existential singularity. Jaspers, too, envisioned the society of the future as bleak and dehumanized:

> If the indvidual counts only in terms of what makes him present, he becomes a universal and no longer a self. There are men predisposed to this form of life: they are those who no longer wish even to be themselves, and they occupy the most prominent place in society.[35]

This image, familiar from the negative utopias, pamphlets and contemporary impressions that we have discussed, refers not to the totalitarianism of a rigid ideology but to a mass society in which, with time, politics is destined to count for less and less. In this kind of society, Jaspers noted, mass man is born as a new anthropological category. His features are the same as those assigned to him by Ortega and the rest: he is unconscious, inhuman, destructive and intolerant of any sort of greatness, and he embraces superstition without faith. Like Benda, Jaspers noted that in order to be socially accepted, the intellectual had to exalt whatever pleased the mass and to accept using the language of advertising. Jaspers wrote:

> Only he who feels comfortable amidst all that is base can avoid recoiling in horror before the repugnant character of the countenance manifested by mass man's appearance and actions, before his odious laughter, his vile pleasures, his ignoble boasting and complaining.

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35 K. Jaspers, *Die Geistige Situation der Zeit*, Berlin–Leipzig 1931, p. 62.

A New Middle Age

For the cultural pessimists, then, democracy as a political system was only a part, and perhaps not even the most significant part, of the malaise, the barbarization they feared or denounced. Their shafts were aimed at more general and neutral targets: industrialism, mass society and modernity.

A distinction should be made here between more and less politicized intellectuals. For those observers of the contemporary age who kept their distance from politics, either because they viewed it as a debased feature of modern times or because they held to the model of the ivory tower, the *mal du siècle* resided in social atomization, in the breakdown of family, group and work solidarity, in the vanishing joy of labour, in existential standardization. They welcomed hierarchies headed by intellectuals who showed the way, and they spoke of the necessity of rediscovering devotion, the spirit of service, the principle of sacrifice.

But whoever, despite himself, responded to the call of these world changes and experienced the thrill of the intellectual in combat, of uniforms, mass regimes, commitment and the word which becomes action; whoever combined contempt for the masses with a fascination with their power, looked favourably upon society's authoritarian trends. In this light, the criticisms of democracy became more specific: it was the very mechanisms of representation, the vote and political participation, as well as the egalitarian principle underpinning this type of government, that were called into question. Often, though, these diatribes against democracy concealed a categorical opposition to modern mass industrial society, in which democratic organization was the ultimate manifestation of an essence perceivable in a thousand other ways.

Let us consider, for example, the passages in which Georges Bernanos defined democracy as the realm of 'imbeciles' (another name for mass men). Bernanos though of the modern world not so much in terms of a particular political system, but in the precise way that Charles Péguy had defined it some years before, despite the political coloration of that definition. For Péguy, the aberration of the modern world lay in the fact that the medium of all exchange had become money. Bernanos wrote:

> Man is by nature resigned. Modern man more than others, because of the extreme solitude in which he is left by a society which hardly knows of any other relationship between individuals except money.

Bernanos's description of the destructiveness of the 'imbeciles' is at times remarkably similar to Ortega's characterization. Referring to this dominant new human category, he writes:

> They have invented neither iron nor fire nor gas but use expertly all that they are given through the only effort they are in reality incapable of, the effort to think by themselves. They will love killing more than thinking, this is the trouble! And you go right ahead and furnish them with mechanical devices!

The danger of barbarization was more acute under democracy — understood in this broad sense — because mob passions were stronger. Bernanos went on to express an opinion that he held in common with Eliot, Ortega, Huizinga and many more great twentieth-century intellectuals,

> People living under democracies are nothing but a mob, a mob perpetually duped by an invisible orator, by opinions originating from every corner of the earth, those opinions that grasp its entrails, with more influence over its nerves the more they strive to speak the same language of its desires, hatreds and terrors.[36]

Eliot, Ortega, Huizinga and Valéry complemented their critique of mass society with an admiration for cohesion and fullness of meaning, for the organicity of the Middle Ages. Eliot sought a remedy for the totalitarianism of mass society in the idea of a Christian community; Ortega admired the vitality of Fascist and Russian Communist-style regimes, which at least had myths and stirred the imagination; while Huizinga nostalgically recalled a world in which everyone was assigned a place and kept to it. Mounier, too, testified to the attraction that the forcefulness of Fascist-type regimes held for him. Broch, who saw the epoch as that in which culture had been most widely disseminated among the masses and was most despised by them, undertook to construct a new unity by restoring the Platonic idea. 'It is a question,' he declared, 'of regaining religiosity in all its communal cohesion.'[37] For Valéry, the true dictatorships were those of the 'general system of existence'[38] which never before had so weighed

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36 G. Bernanos, *Les grands cimetières sous la lune*, Paris 1938; Italian translation, Milan 1967, pp. 15, 17 and 20.
37 H. Broch, *Die Kunst am Ende einer Kultur* (1933), in *Il Kitsch* (above, note 1), p. 108.
38 P. Valéry, 'Au sujet de la dictature' (1938), in *Regards sur le monde actuel et autres essais*, Paris 1945, p. 72.

upon and regulated humanity. 'My conclusion,' he observed, 'is that political freedom is the surest means of making men slaves.'[39] If man was enslaved by anything, it was not political dictatorships, but modernity.

When disaffection for one's own time is so great, when liberalism appears as a sclerotic system and democracy as an invitation to barbarity, when modernity is experienced as a sickness and progress is tantamount to degeneration, what is likely to mount is the desire to escape from it all, from this life of servitude, this mediocre culture and waning vitality. One means of doing so was to view the developments of the period from an aloof distance. Other escapes took a backward direction, in the quest for strong, unitary, contemplative epochs. For many, including Berdyayev, Broch, Huizinga and others, that meant the Middle Ages. Others, like Guénon and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, whose pessimism was still more radical and extreme, looked to the dawn of human history, the mythic, heroic, superhuman solar ages inhabited by warriors and godlike men. Lastly, there were those, like D.H. Lawrence and Herman Hesse, who would simply have wiped the slate clean of this world of machines and madness.

All of these thinkers reviled the present as evil, degenerate, mediocre or nightmarish. All of them, furthermore, saw as a central issue the destiny of the intellectual in a 'mass,' 'democratic,' 'modern' society, depending on the designation preferred — the three terms being, for our authors, mutually interchangeable. They felt that the society of 'imbeciles' was transforming them into manufacturers: in the worst case, manufacturers of material goods, or, only slightly better, suppliers of merchandise to be consumed in the marketplace of culture. Overwhelmed by the ongoing transformations in which they saw their own role being continually degraded, they remained extremely sensitive to the notions of spiritual hierarchy, social guidance and the organicity of the social body. They reacted in different ways: some by championing the purity of the *clerc*, some by deprecating mass civilization, others by emphasizing their estrangement from politics and their lack of influence, and still others by dreaming about the leadership roles their caste no longer had.

In some ways, the world was just as they saw it: Europe was indeed dominated by dictatorships, even if they were political in character and not dictatorships of modernity; the masses, though they demanded

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39 Idem, 'Fluctuations sur la liberté' (1938), in *ibid.*, p. 90.

power, often passively followed their leaders' watchwords. For the most part, though, these intellectuals failed to leave the ivory tower of their mental constructs, and their criticisms of democracy remained mere idle reflections. Nevertheless, the climate they helped to create is responsible for the discredit into which liberal democracies fell in those years. The cultural pessimists paved the intellectual way for those who wished to flock toward strong, if unjust, regimes. Nostalgia for a leadership role the intellectuals felt they were losing contributed much to their pessimistic assessments of the present, and to their contempt for production, prosperity and the standardization wrought by mass civilization. From their perspective, facing what they saw as their destiny either as manufacturers or as technicians of the big machine, the uniform took on a special beauty, while the inequalities imposed by authoritarian regimes assumed a unique validity. Even those who fought on the 'right' side, or who did not fight at all, contributed to spreading the notion that anything was better than the moribund liberal democracies, that mankind could find itself again only by abandoning its formal freedoms, and that civilization could be saved only by the energy and the warrior spirit of radically antimodern men.

PART II:
GERMANY — ANTIMODERN MODERNISM

Jeffrey Herf

Reactionary Modernism Reconsidered: Modernity, the West and the Nazis

In the following remarks, I want to reconsider, in light of subsequent works on modernity and antimodernity in German history and in National Socialism, my argument for the existence of a 'reactionary modernist' tradition in Germany, as expressed in my book *Reactionary Modernism*. I will reconstruct the problem and the book's central thesis, and then touch briefly upon four related issues that have been the focus of discussion in the literature about National Socialism: the historical validity of the idea of a German *Sonderweg* and its explanatory importance; the significance and explanatory importance of World War I; the link between assertions of the autonomous role of technology and the intellectual assault on liberal democracy; and the reactionary modernist view of technology, capitalism and the Jews.

The attempt to identify the modern elements of National Socialism without losing sight of the German dictatorship's radical and pervasive rejection not just of modernity, but of the predominant traditions of the West, has turned out to be an elusive quest. I want to argue that one task of intellectual history should be to bring back to the discussion of modernity and antimodernity a moral perspective that has been lacking in the language of social science, historical determinism and philosophical reflections on modernity.

Reactionary Modernism: The Thesis Restated

The reactionary modernism thesis filled a lacuna left by the classic studies of Fritz Stern and George Mosse[1] in the study of the ideological origins of National Socialism. The key question was how, if at all, German intellectuals of the antidemocratic right reconciled their

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1 F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1961 (reprinted 1974); G. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York 1964.

'politics of cultural despair' and *'volkisch* ideology' with modernity. In addition to Stern and Mosse, Talcott Parsons in the 1930s and Henry A. Turner, Jr., in the 1970s looked at Nazi ideology as 'utopian antimodernism,' directed against the symbols, practices, and peoples thought to represent modernity: liberalism, socialism, Marxism, science, parliamentary democracy, internationalism, the metropolis, money and the Jews.[2] These analysts viewed Hitler's *Lebensraum* visions, the war against the Soviet Union and the Holocaust as parts of this all-encompassing rejection of modernity. Yet how could a movement and regime driven by a full-scale rejection of modernity generate enough power in the twentieth century to attain its goals?[3]

In the 1960s, Ralf Dahrendorf and David Schonbaum focused scholarly attention on what they saw as a contradiction between the antimodernist core of Nazi ideology and the manifestly modernizing practices of the Nazi regime. Schonbaum wrote that the Nazis used bourgeois and industrial society to carry out their antimodern programme. Nazism, a home for true believers, also had plenty of room for cynics, opportunists and people who had no regard for ideological consistency.[4] As Dahrendorf put it in *Society and Democracy in Germany*, because the 'strong push to modernity' was National Socialism's decisive feature, there was a striking contrast between Nazi ideology and practice. 'The veil of ideology,' he wrote, 'should not deceive us,' for the gap between ideology and practice was so striking that 'one is almost tempted to believe that the ideology was simply an effort to mislead people deliberately.'[5]

But if ideology and practice were so at odds, how do we account for their terrible unity during the war and the Holocaust? Perhaps the 'strong push to modernity' did not, after all, come at the expense of ideological coherence. Could it be, as Karl Bracher has suggested,

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2 See G. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, Darmstadt 1962; H. Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation*, Frankfurt a/M 1974; T. Parsons, 'Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany,' in *Essays in Sociological Theory*, New York 1964, p. 123; and H.J. Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization,' in *Reappraisals in Fascism*, New York 1975, pp. 117–139.

3 Reinhard Bendix in his comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Japan summarizes the dilemmas of nationalist 'men of letters' as follows: 'Perceptions of advances abroad are reminders of backwardness or dangers and weaknesses at home. Men of letters must try to cope with the dilemmas of this recurrent situation: whether to adopt an advanced model and invite its attendant corruptions, or fall back on native traditions and risk their inappropriateness to world power and progress' (*Kings or People*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1978, p. 603).

4 D. Schonbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution*, New York 1967, p. 276.

5 R. Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, New York 1966, pp. 381–386.

that the 'underestimation of Hitler' in the 1930s, the failure to take him and the National Socialist ideology seriously, found an echo in the rationalistic bias of postwar scholarship?[6] With such questions in mind, I took another look at the ideology of the right-wing intellectuals and the Nazis.

In *Reactionary Modernism*,[7] I made the following claim. Before and after the Nazi seizure of power, an important current within German conservative and subsequently Nazi ideology was a reconciliation between, on the one hand, the antimodernist, romantic and irrationalist ideas present in German nationalism, and, on the other, the most obvious manifestation of a rationality of means and ends: modern technology. I called this tradition 'reactionary modernism' in order to draw attention to its paradoxical interweaving of backward- and forward-looking ideas. Its major exponents were leading anti-democratic, right-wing intellectuals of the Weimar Republic such as Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Hans Freyer and Werner Sombart, leading figures of the Nazi party such as Goebbels and Hitler, and a small number of German engineers and professors of engineering who interested themselves in cultural questions related to technology.

'Reactionary modernism' was a construct, an ideal type. None of the authors I interpreted used the term to describe themselves. It was an amalgam of shared metaphors, familiar words and emotionally laden expressions which had the effect of converting technology from a component of alien, Western *Zivilisation* into an organic part of German *Kultur*. The reactionary modernists were thinkers and ideologues who rejected liberal democracy and the legacy of the Enlightenment, yet simultaneously embraced the modern technology of the second industrial revolution. Where German conservatives had spoken of technology *or* culture, the reactionary modernists taught the German Right to speak of technology *with* culture. Reactionary modernist ideology was not primarily a pragmatic or tactical orientation, although it did transform military-industrial necessities into cultural virtues. Rather, it incorporated modern technology into the cultural system of German nationalism, without diminishing its romantic,

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6 K.D. Bracher, 'Tradition und Revolution in Nationalsozialismus,' in *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen: Um Faschismus, Totlitarismus, Demokratie*, Munich 1984, pp. 63–79; Walther Hofer, 'Fifty Years On: Historians and the Third Reich,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXI (1986), pp. 225–251; and T. Nipperdey, 'Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland,' in *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich 1986, pp. 58–59.

7 J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, New York 1984.

irrationalist and anti-Western components. The reactionary modernists were German nationalists who turned the revolt against capitalism and materialism away from a backward-looking pastoralism. They pointed to the outlines of a beautiful new order, replacing the formless chaos of bourgeois society with the clear forms of a technologically advanced authoritarian regime.

The reactionary modernists confronted a dilemma faced by all nationalist intellectuals, namely: can the nation be both technologically modern and true to its soul? The anti-Western and antimodernist legacy of German nationalism suggested that such a reconciliation between soul and technology was out of the question. But the reactionary modernists understood that Luddism was a formula for national impotence. The *Kulturnation* could, they argued, be both strong and good, powerful and true to its soul. This cultural aspiration was most clearly articulated after World War I. It contributed to the persistence of Nazi ideology after 1933, facilitating a blend of technical advance and ideological commitment.

The reactionary modernists understood how to embrace one aspect of modernity — technology — yet remain loyal to long-standing illiberal, antimodern and, often, antisemitic political traditions. They separated technology from the realm of *Zivilisation* and placed it in the realm of *Kultur*. They saw in technology a thing of beauty, a product of German creativity rather than of Jewish commercialism and internationalism, a phenomenon in tune with totalitarianism rather than with liberal democracy, an expression of the will-to-power and a reminder of the masculine *Gemeinschaft* of 1914–1918 — as well as an indispensable tool for the realization of political ends. They depicted a distinctively German path to modernity, which had much room for technological advance but none for liberal democracy.

Reactionary Modernism and the Sonderweg

In contrast to the thesis of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno that a dialectic of Enlightenment and of modernity in general was at the root of Nazism and the Holocaust,[8] *Reactionary Modernism* placed the interpenetration of myth and rationality back into the context of German history. I argued, somewhat conventionally, that Germany suffered from a deficiency rather than an excess of reason and enlightenment. So, via this critique of the thesis of the dialectic

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8   M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York 1972, p. 3.

of Enlightenment, I stated a newer version of the thesis of an illiberal, authoritarian German *Sonderweg* at a time when that thesis was subject to critical scrutiny. As Stephen Aschheim subsequently noted, I presented a new version of the German *Sonderweg* which focused on how the Germans responded to the challenge of rapid modernization.[9]

I want to assess reactionary modernism in the light of criticisms of the *Sonderweg* thesis by the historians Geoffrey Eley and David Blackbourn, on the left, and Thomas Nipperdey on the centre to centre right. Blackbourn and Eley have rejected the view that there was a peculiarly illiberal, anti-Western path to modernity in nineteenth-century Germany that could explain the rise of Nazism. They argue that the British and French bourgeoisie were not as heroic and free of feudal mentalities or anticapitalist sentiments as German historians have supposed.[10] Blackbourn refers to Germany's 'successful bourgeois revolution' in the nineteenth century, pointing to the country's astonishing economic development, the creation of a national market, provisions for social welfare, and the emergence of parliaments and a public sphere of debate.[11] The marriage of iron and rye, rather than representing German backwardness, was a normal marriage of convenience by elites seeking allies in a fight with a socialist working class. Eley has gone further, attacking intellectual historians for 'pedigree hunting' and selective reading of texts by 'a few maverick thinkers,' and neglecting what in his view was the more important populist, mass-based nationalism of the *Kaiserreich* era.[12] The key, he asserts, was 'a profound metamorphosis in the character of the German right between the 1870s and the 1920s, involving a massive expansion of its social base and a drastic radicalization of its ideology and general political style.'[13]

Yet it was a cultural and intellectual historian, George Mosse, whose book, *Crisis of German Ideology* (1964) had first stressed the links between *Geistesgeschichte* and popular culture. Eley is on stronger ground when he criticizes 'a kind of inevitabilism — a long-range socio-cultural determinism of pre-industrial traditions,' and instead takes the view

9   S. Aschheim, 'Nazism, Normalcy and the German Sonderweg,' *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, IV (1988), pp. 276–292.

10 D. Blackbourn & G. Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, New York 1984.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

12 G. Eley, 'The German Right, 1860–1945,' in idem, *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past*, Boston 1986, p. 234.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

that German nationalism was not only a matter of 'pre-industrial traditions' or a feudalized bourgeoisie, but also had fully modern components.[14] But here, too, both Eley and Blackbourn are vulnerable to the same criticism which they make of conventional advocates of the *Sonderweg* thesis. Assuming for a moment that the German Right did change in significant ways before World War I, and even before 1900, the causal chain towards National Socialism still had twenty to thirty years to go before 1933. Were the events of those years so unimportant that there were no developments or contingencies that could conceivably have made German Fascism impossible? If so, how can we integrate a search for the origins and roots of events in the past with a consideration of the undetermined acts that also comprise human history? Surely Eley cannot take cultural historians to task for 'inevitabilism' and then restore a new version of the same kind of argument by implying that the transformation of the German right before World War I led inexorably to Nazism. If Eley wants us abandon the litany of a straight, or, for that matter, crooked line from Luther to Hitler, he ought not suggest a new line leading from 'unification to Nazism.'[15]

This problem has preoccupied the German historian Thomas Nipperdey, who has urged a renewed focus on the multiplicity of contingencies and continuities in German history, and accordingly rejects the idea of a single *Sonderweg* or line of development.[16] Instead, he points to a 'network of prehistories,' with options for alternative paths at every moment.[17] As we saw in the *Historikersstreit*, this idea of

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14 G. Eley, 'What Produces Fascism,' in *From Unification to Nazism*, p. 261. Despite his comment about 'selective reading,' Eley does not present an alternative or contrasting reading of the right-wing ideologues of the late nineteenth century from that which appears in Stern's and Mosse's earlier studies of the politics of cultural despair and *volkisch* ideology.

15 Eley's focus on mass mobilization fills out an agenda Mosse articulated in the 1960s — that is, one which grasped Fascism and National Socialism as mass movements with their own liturgies, ideologies and cultural articulations — and it did so at a time when Marxist historians were still entangled in analyzing the links between 'Fascism and capitalism.' For a clear and spirited discussion of long-standing but often overlooked links between intellectual and social history and historians see G. Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

16 See T. Nipperdey, 'Wehler's Kaiserreich: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung,' in idem, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte*, Göttingen 1976, pp. 360–389, first published in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 1 (1975), pp. 539–560.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 544. 'History,' Nipperdey writes, 'must give back to the past what the future now possesses (and what the past which was once the future once possessed), namely, the uncertainty which inheres in it even though scholarship must try as much as possible to work out the elements of relative necessity.'

multiple prehistories became an asset in the hands of certain scholars, laden with resentment and a desire to forget the dark continuities in the German past, in their apologetic efforts to present a less uniformly depressing picture. But Nipperdey is both a fine historian and a man of good will. His primary intent is not to forget the dark times but to enhance our understanding of how they came to pass, by restoring aspects of human freedom and choice that are eliminated by historical determinisms. In a 1975 review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Deutsche Kaiserreich*, Nipperdey appealed for a return to the drama and contingency of history. 'We have had enough history of the victors. One must lend a voice to the dead opponents. This is a piece of justice which inheres in historicism and is worlds apart from the "critical" school.'[18] Nipperdey's plea was not for an apologetic history, but for a history of Germany which could view 1933 as only one of a number of possibilities emerging from previous developments.[19]

Among the 'dead opponents,' lost causes, and 'other Germanies' that Nipperdey mentions are the following: a developed educational system from gymnasium to technical universities, and humanistic universities which became a world model; students devoted to social reform, alongside the beer-drinking, duelling fraternities; *Kathedersozialisten*, Protestant-liberal theologians and liberal-conservative critics such as Otto Hintze, Hans Delbrück, Friedrich Meinecke, Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber; and liberal critics of Wilhelminian conventions in education, art, urban design and architecture both before and after World War I. Luther and the Reformation, in addition to generating the apolitical tradition, a revival of antisemitism, and the trend towards slavish subordination to the state, also made contributions to European modernity by fostering a pluralism of states, cities and universities, a scholarly based theology, and eventually the secularized Protestantism of Kant, Hegel and the Enlightenment. The bureaucracy was not all bad, either. In contrast to particularistic local traditions, it was well educated and oriented towards rationality, expertise and national concerns, becoming a propeller of later modernization, absolutist reform, economic growth, the welfare state and the educational system.

Just as there were elements of modernity in pre–nineteenth century German history, so Nipperdey saw elements of further modernization

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18 *Ibid.*, p. 547.
19 When Sartre offered a far more ahistorical argument in the 1940s, he became a leading spokesperson of the left. It is strange that in recent years, Nipperdey's far more historically grounded appeal to freedeom and his insistence on the role of contingency in history and politics should appear as a conservative approach.

during the *Kaiserreich*: nationalism, imperialism and militarism had modernizing components; the interventionist state required legal clarity and enhanced the power of the *Reichstag*; the ideology of negative integration directed against the Social Democrats in 1870 and 1880 diminished with time; and the *Zentrum* and the left-liberals became respected parties on which governments rested. Conversely, revisionism and reformism within Social Democracy came to comprise the dominant voice in the SPD. How, asks Nipperdey, can one explain the rise of Social Democratic revisionism if the German *Sonderweg* was so uniformly authoritarian? How is the picture painted by Eduard Bernstein in his *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899) — one of diminishing class antagonisms, declining disparities of income and property, and rising living standards within the working class — explicable in a system whose only continuity lay in an unregenerate and authoritarian character? And how can one explain the integration of the previous *Reichsfeinde* (enemies of the Reich) in 1914, including not only Catholics and left-liberals, but also Social Democrats and Jews? How can one account for the political coalition that gave its support, however unenthusiastically, to the Weimar Republic before it collapsed?[20] For Nipperdey, Wilhelminian society was indeed characterized by authoritarianism, militarism, imperialism and a want of liberal political culture, but it was also 'a society of reforms, of a farewell to the nineteenth century, and ... above all, it was a society of criticism. It was becoming more bourgeois and liberal, and it developed the potential for a democracy to come.'[21]

But, why, despite this network of multiple continuities, did one particular set win out in 1933? Was the burden of German history so indeterminate that 1933 eludes historical explanation and becomes simply an unfortunate case of bad luck and bad timing? Nipperdey, the historian of multiple contingencies in German history, is not willing to go that far. He, too, points to an intense crisis of modernization in nineteenth-century Germany. In the same vein, the German social historian Jurgen Kocka has brought modernization theory to bear on the timing of German history to account for the *deutschen Sonderweg*.[22]

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20 See T. Nipperdey, 'Die wilhelminische Gesellschaft,' in *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich 1986.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
22 See J. Kocka, 'German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXIII (1988), pp. 3–16. Kocka's more recent comments on the *Sonderweg* debate, which also focus on the 'burdensome, overdemanding simultaneity of three fundamental problems' — the formation of the

For Kocka, the most important peculiarity of German history in the nineteenth century, that which most clearly distinguished Germany from Britain and France, was that the formation of national identity occurred simultaneously with the development of modern political institutions and of capitalism:

> In short, in Germany, a series of processes overlapped one another, a series of problems were almost simultaneously posed which elsewhere took place one after the other: industrialization, socialism, mass democracy, economic-social pluralism, formation of the national state and the nation, and then the political-participatory modernization, the dissolution or pushing back of old elites. Or in the concepts of modernization theory: Crises of identity, legitimacy, participation, distribution, and integration were simultaneously to be solved. It was this simultaneous emergence of problems of modernization which hindered and prevented political modernization.[23]

With these issues of simultaneity in mind, Nipperdey also pointed to a crisis of modernization, in which a weak liberal tradition, an anxious political class, the loss of World War I, the burdens that hampered the newly founded Weimar Republic, the economic crises of inflation and then depression, and the real or imagined threat of Communist revolution accounted for the emergent possibility of National Socialism.[24] He rejected the Frankfurt school's critical theory, which placed the blame on bourgeois-liberal rationality, as a 'very German hypostasization of German history into world history.'[25]

For intellectual and cultural historians, the key dimension of German particularity thus lies not only, and in many cases not at all, in the particular character of the ideas advocated by leading German intellectuals. Social Darwinism, militarism, the romantic celebration of violence, hostility to bourgeois flabbiness, racism and hyper-nationalism were not peculiar to Germany. Even if we stress the

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nation, industrialization and class conflicts, and the development of parliamentary institutions — give a similar impression.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

24 T. Nipperdey, '1933 und die Kontinuität der deutschen Geschichte,' in idem, *Nachdenken* (above, note 20), p. 189.

25 Nipperdey's 1979 essay on modernization in German history leaves me with the impression that the right balance between long- and short-term factors in grasping the rise of Nazism had already been found by Karl Bracher in *The German Dictatorship*, New York 1970.

Grundlichkeit with which German intellectuals pursued these themes, there were British, French and Italian analogues. But because of the simultaneity of crises in the late nineteenth century — because Germany was, in Helmut Plessner's apt phrase, the belated nation — the emergence of antidemocratic, antirational and illiberal traditions among German intellectuals from 1890 to the 1930s played a decisive role in shaping the national identity of the German Reich. The ideas of French Fascism in many ways echoed those of the German right in this era, but Germany's liberal traditions were far weaker and more peripheral to the national identity than was the embattled but still central tradition of French republicanism. By the twentieth century, antidemocratic intellectuals in Britain and France lived in countries whose national identities — especially in the case of Britain — had been established long ago. In Germany, the issue of national identity was still to be decided — in geographical, political, cultural and social terms. The German fascination with intellectual history and the prominence awarded to *Geistesgeschichte* reflected the political importance of ideas in a society and nation still seeking its centre and identity.

World War I and the *Fronterlebnis* served as a crucible from which a national socialist vision of the German national identity emerged, and in which German nationalism learned to reconcile itself to modern technology. The intellectual assault on liberal democracy and the reconciliation of modern and antimodern elements both gained ground in the trenches of World War I. Neither made National Socialism inevitable — the network of continuities in the period of the Weimar Republic was too complex for that. But without World War I, the emergence of National Socialism as a fully developed ideology and political practice would have been inconceivable.

Reactionary Modernism and World War I

World War I was the decisive event for the full articulation of a reactionary modernist tradition, and for the intellectual radicalization of an already anti-Western, illiberal nationalist tradition. Important ideological elements — nationalism, antisemitism, *Lebensphilosophie*, Nietszcheanism, modernist aesthetics, a yearning for *Gemeinschaft* — had existed before the war, but it was in the trenches that the right-wing intellectuals first — as they thought — experienced a post-bourgeois, illiberal community. National Socialism was, in one sense, an attempt to make permanent these 'best days of their lives,' to turn the *Gemeinschaft* of the trenches into a *Volksgemeinschaft*. The entire leadership of the

Nazi party and all of the leading figures of the Nazi regime were soldiers in World War I. No German author captured the transformative impact of the Great War on this generation of illiberal Germans more effectively than Ernst Jünger. And no critic of the time captured Jünger's importance more quickly and clearly than Walter Benjamin.

In his 1930 essay on Ernst Jünger's *Krieg und Krieger*, a collection of writings about the *Fronterlebnis*, Walter Benjamin referred to a 'new theory of war' in the writings of the postwar, antidemocratic right-wing intelligentsia. Benjamin argued that the real purpose of this theory was compensatory: it was to transform Germany's humiliating defeat into a victory of aesthetic form and beauty over the formless and chaotic materialism of liberal democracy.[26] Benjamin's observations shed some light on a curious dimension of the reactionary modernist and National Socialist ideology of the 1920s. A pervasive theme in this ideological complex was the notion that liberal democracies were weak, incapable of decisive action, hopelessly divided and bereft of strong leadership. But why should democracies appear weak and irresolute after they had vanquished the Germans on the field of battle? Why was there no flood of books and articles in Germany about the fragility of authoritarian governments in an era of total war? We know — and the German generals knew in 1918 — that Germany had lost the war on the battlefield, and that continuing the war after the American entry would have brought the fighting back to Germany itself. It was also apparent to some German strategists that Germany could not win hegemony in Europe without defeating Britain, and that goal could not be achieved without bringing the United States into the war.

Rather than face this uncomfortable truth about the limits of German power, Germany's traditional and radical right developed the *Dolchstosslegende*, the idea that the war was lost in Berlin rather than by the military in France.[27] According to the *Dolchstosslegende*, it was the November Revolution of 1918, and wartime dissent in general, led by Communists and Social Democrats, which had sapped the will of the home front when victory was at hand. An excess of democracy in Germany had brought about military defeat. Jünger's writings also suggested that an inadequate technological mobilization for the war had contributed to the defeat, and that only technological progress offered hope for German nationalists.

26 W. Benjamin, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *New German Critique*, XVII (1979), p. 125.
27 U. Heinemann, 'Die Last der Vergangenheit: Zur politischen Bedeutung der Kriegsschuld- und Dolschstossdiskussion,' in K.D. Bracher, M. Funke & H.-A. Jacobson (eds.), *Die Weimarer Republik, 1918–1933*, Dusseldorf 1987, pp. 371–386.

As Benjamin noted, Jünger saw the war as a redemptive and transformative process. He sought to reorient the views of right-wing German intellectuals towards technology by evoking a special generational experience. 'Ours is the first generation to begin to reconcile itself with the machine and to see in it not only the useful but the beautiful as well.'[28] Paralleling Marxist dialectics, Jünger viewed the war as the source of a new man; the defeat itself bore within it the promise of future victories. In *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922), he called the war:

> the father of all things ... and our father as well. It hammered, chiseled, and hardened us into what we are. ... As long as life's oscillating wheel rotates inside us, this war will remain the axle around which it hums.[29]

Rather than speak out of the experience of national defeat, Jünger welcomed the cultural renewal brought by the war.

> The tender cult of the brain collapsed in a rattling rebirth of barbarism. Other gods have been raised to the throne of the day: power, Faust, and manly courage.[30]

War and battle were a relief from the boredom entrenched by a middle class obsessed with security.

Jünger sang the praises of the masculine community of the trenches, which, in his view, offered a tangible utopia, a real alternative to liberal, bourgeois society. Individual soldiers, despite 'small conflicts,' became new men 'with granite faces that rattled order,' smooth, hardened bodies, chiseled features, 'a wholly new race, intelligent, strong and full of will.'[31] The image of the 'steel form' as the axis around which life would revolve in the future remained a central theme in Jünger's work. The war had not been in vain, for it had burned away bourgeois and feminine refinement, revealing an image of the new man. The masculine community of the trenches and the resulting new man were rediscovered treasures of the reactionary tradition. War was the source of a new era:

> The glowing dusk of a sinking era is at the same time a dawn, by arming us for new, harder fighting. ... The war is not the end but

28 E. Jünger, *Feuer und Blut*, Berlin 1929 (reprinted Stuttgart 1960), p. 81.
29 *Der Kampf also inneres Erlebnis*, Berlin 1922 (reprinted Stuttgart 1960), p. 13.
30 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

rather the emergence of violence. It is the forge in which the world will be hammered into new limits and new communities. New forms filled with blood and power will be packed with a hard fist. The war is a great school, and the new man will be taken from our race.[32]

Jünger embraced technology as a crucial aspect of this transformative experience, while at the same time rejecting a more all-encompassing modernity — liberal democracy, Marxism, socialism or individual liberty. On the contrary, his essays of the 1920s depict individuals subject to a technology they do not control, yet which is also an expression of their 'innermost will.' As he put it in a 1927 essay on 'Progress, Freedom and Necessity,'

> If it is not our intention, so it is certainly our innermost will to sacrifice our freedom, to give up our existence as individuals and to melt into a large life circle, in which the individual has as little self-sufficiency as a cell which must die when separated from the body.[33]

Rather than seek a liberation of individuals from these forces beyond their control, Jünger sought a 'heroic' resignation to this new technological world.

Ernst Jünger found hope in technological advance. The idea of total mobilization, of 'the transformation of life into energy,' was part of Jünger's explanation of why Germany lost World War I. Germany had lacked adequate technological and economic mobilization.[34] The Right had to remove barriers to such mobilization — such as lingering hostility to technology in its own ranks, as well as liberal democratic institutions, which raised obstacles to rearmament.[35] In *Der Arbeiter* (1932), his best-known work of the Weimar years, Jünger argued that liberal democracy and bourgeois culture were ill-suited to the demands of a nation in the midst of total mobilization.[36] In his *Gestalt* of the worker-soldier, Jünger found the centrepiece of a post-bourgeois, advanced industrial dictatorship, in which the chaos of

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32 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
33 E. Jünger, 'Fortschritt, Freiheit und Notwendigkeit,' *Arminius*, VIII (1926), pp. 8–20.
34 Idem, 'Die totale Mobilmachung,' in *Ernst Jünger Werke*, Stuttgart 1960–1965, V: *Essays*, pp. 125–147.
35 Idem, *Feuer und Bewegung*, in *Werke* (above, note 34), I, pp. 113–114.
36 Idem, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*, Berlin 1932, reprinted in *Werke* (above, note 34), VI: *Essays II*, p. 48.

parliamentary debate gave way to the 'greater cleanliness and definition of ... technical will toward form.' In place of the compromises and confusions of liberal politics, technology offered a model of clear form. True modernity was neither liberal nor Marxist. Technology, for Jünger, was not a neutral force but one inherently in conflict with democracy. Authoritarian technology called for an authoritarian state. While authoritarian and totalitarian political institutions had about them a beautiful clarity, parliamentary institutions were, by comparison, a political and aesthetic mess. It was this mess, this chaos, and the individuals that flourished within it that were obsolete. Rather than attack liberal democracy as an aspect of modernity that threatened tradition, Jünger denounced it as a relic of the past.

This view of liberal democracy as out of date and indecisive, rather than as excessively modern, was evident as well in the essays of two figures who contributed to the reactionary modernist tradition, Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer. In his 1919 essay, *Politische Romantik*, Schmitt, like Jünger, scorned the search for security. Because, in his view, the German political romantics of the nineteenth century had never wanted to do anything, the 'endless' talk of parliaments was their natural home, a home where feminine passivity and lack of aesthetic form were the norm.[37] Like Jünger and Oswald Spengler, Schmitt evoked a masculine cult of action. A constant theme in the reactionary modernist — and Nazi, and Fascist — ideologies of the period is the association of liberal democracy with the feminine, which, in turn, was associated with weakness.

A further motive for Schmitt's rejection of liberal democracy was his cult of decisiveness, his view that making decisions was a value in itself. Liberalism, he wrote, was a negation of the political. Liberal individualism undermined the creation of a militant, national, political community. Worst of all, liberalism eroded the primacy of politics with 'ethical pathos and materialist-economic sobriety.'[38] It domesticated political struggle by turning it into economic competition; it emasculated real intellectual conflicts by turning them into parliamentary discussions; and it sought to submerge the autonomy of the state in a welter of conflicting yet self-interested publics. Liberalism sought to subordinate the state to society. Marxism, for Schmitt and for Weimar's antidemocratic right in general, was

37 C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, Munich–Leipzig 1919, p. 28.
38 Idem, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, p. 56.

not an alternative to liberal materialism but a continuation of it. Both denied the primacy of politics.

The source of the 'spiritlessness' of modern society, wrote Schmitt, did not lie in modern technology. Technology had a 'spirit' guided by an 'activist metaphysic,' a belief in limitless power and domination over nature.[39] Hope for the future lay in a new elite which would grasp this activist metaphysic that had been ignored by the exponents of cultural pessimism. This *Geist* of technology was something other than positivism. It was linked, rather, to an ethic of will power, combat and struggle, and it had an inherent affinity with authoritarian politics. For Carl Schmitt, a fully modern politics would dispense with parliamentary discussion, and would liberate technology from the fetters of liberal democracy.

Hans Freyer, too, sought an illiberal national community in which individuals would be completely integrated, rather than left to be isolated from one another as a result of the economic structures of the nineteenth century.[40] Nationalism, he hoped, would become a secular religion capable of leading the Germans out of fragmentation and materialism. This program called for a *Revolution von Rechts*, a revolution from the right — the title of an essay Freyer published in 1931. He urged German nationalists to rid themselves of anti-technological sentiments. 'Contemporaneity,' he said, 'is no longer compromise.'[41] After the failure of the Communist revolutions of 1918–1923, liberalism and Marxism had lost their revolutionary élan. A revolution from the right, led by the *Volk*, would create a national community under the leadership of the state. For Hans Freyer, a renewed primacy of politics would reconcile the people with technology, a technology no longer guided primarily by commercial interests. For both Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer, liberal democracy was a part of the obsolete nineteenth century. It had become old-fashioned and out of step with a technology whose essence seemed to demand authoritarian and totalitarian politics.

Martin Heidegger, whose persistent philosophical and political commitment to National Socialism up through 1945 is now beyond

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39 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
40 H. Freyer, *Die Bewertung des Wirtschaft: im philosophischen Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1921 (reprinted Hildesheim 1966), pp. 159–160. On Freyer see Jerry Z. Muller's important study, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, Princeton 1988; and see my *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 121–129.
41 H. Freyer, *Revolution von Rechts*, Jena 1931, p. 72.

doubt,[42] was not a contributor to the reactionary modernist tradition. His attraction to National Socialism, however, was linked to his views on technology. In his *Rektoradesrede* and his other addresses of 1933/34, delivered while he was Rector of the University of Freiburg, he spoke of sacrifice and service to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and looked to the National Socialist revolution to bring a 'complete transformation of our German being.'[43] Heidegger's attraction to Nazism was linked to an antimodernist lament over the isolated and angst-filled individual, and to the hope that the Germans would be able to save themselves from the devastations wrought by two thousand years of soulless technological progress. His complaint extended much further back than the processes set in motion by the French and industrial revolutions. It encompassed Western rationality since the Greeks, with their aspiration to dominate nature. In 1935, Heidegger wrote:

> Our *Volk* feels it is in the middle of a sharp pincer movement between America and Russia. We are the people with the most neighbours, and thus the most endangered people. But we are also the most metaphysical people.[44]

National Socialism promised to save the German *Dasein* (existence) from this pincer movement, but Heidegger concluded that the Nazis in power were not realizing this goal. Two thousand years of forgetfulness of true being and technical advance still continued under the Nazis.

If Heidegger made a distinctive contribution to the intellectual assault on liberal democracy from 1880 to 1945 — and after 1945 as well — it lay in a corollary of his technological pessimism: namely, that political differences between Marxist totalitarian dictatorship and liberal democracy pale into insignificance compared to the fallen state, under both, of technological advance.[45] From his standpoint, the Americans and the Russians were identical in that both fostered a 'wild and endless race of unleashed technology and rootless organization of average individuals.'[46] Only Germany, the nation in the middle, stood

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42 On this issue see V. Farias, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a/M 1989. On Heidegger's ontology and his politics see Winfried Franzen, *Von der Existenzialontologie zur Seingeschichte: Eine Untersuchung über die Entwicklung der Philosophie der Martin Heideggers*, Meisenheim am Glan 1975.

43 See *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 109–111.

44 M. Heidegger, *Einfürung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen 1966³, p. 29.

45 For a most insightful and revealing discussion of Heidegger's wartime and postwar writings on technology and politics see M. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, Bloomington, Ind., 1990, especially Chaps. 3–6.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

a chance of developing a new historical, spiritual force, and, by so doing, of saving Europe from destruction. In 1944, Heidegger wrote:

> He who has ears to hear ... can already for two decades hear the word of Lenin: Bolshevism is Soviet power + electrification. This means: Bolshevism is the 'organic,' i.e., calculatively organized (and as +) thrusting together of the unconditioned power of the party with fully realized technologization.[47]

In 1942 he had written:

> Bolshevism is only a variety of Americanism. The latter is the genuinely dangerous form of the measureless, because it arises in the form of bourgeois democracy and is mixed with Christendom, and all this in an atmosphere of a decisive absence of history.[48]

What we may call 'the great equation' between the United States and the Soviet Union became a recurrent theme of the twentieth-century intellectual assault on liberal democracy. In Weimar and in Nazi Germany it was a staple of right-wing thinking. During the Cold War it became a recurrent theme of neutralist sentiment in Europe. The intellectual and political history of this great equation remains to be written.

Heidegger's insistence on this equation, his refusal or inability to make distinctions between democracy and dictatorship, did not end in 1945. After the war, he concluded that the war and its outcome had not decided anything.[49] The two technological giants, having vanquished the Germans, now fought for total control of the earth. Postwar Europe had to make decisions about the future of being, yet it was being forced 'into politico-social and moral categories that are in all respects too narrow and faint-hearted, and thus will be deprived of the possibility of due consideration and reflection.'[50] It was still in the grip of the technological will to power, which, he argued, was responsible for starting both wars. Somehow, he hoped for deliverance by a new elite which could lead humanity out of the technological desert.

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47 M. Heidegger, *Parmeneides*, ed. M. Frings (1982), cited in Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation* (above, note 45), p. 90.
48 M. Heidegger, *Hölderlein's Hymne 'Der Ister'* (Summer Semester 1942), ed. Walter Biemel, Ochwaldt 1982, cited in Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation* (above, note 45), p. 90.
49 M. Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?* Tübingen 1954.
50 *Ibid.*, pp. 64–67.

In Germany, the great equation of East and West found echoes in the reactionary modernist tradition. Some of the cultural politicians of the German engineering profession, whose work I examined in *Reactionary Modernism*, wrote that both Russia and America were materialistic and lacked a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of technology, and that it was therefore up to Germany to combine *Geist* and *Technik*.[51] Heinrich Hardensett was one of the most prolific contributors to the journal *Technik und Kultur*, a journal of cultural politics written for engineers in the Weimar and early Nazi years. He was the author of *Der kapitalistische und der technische Mensch* (1932), a work which drew in equal measure upon German social theory and upon the indigenous traditions of German professors of engineering and men of letters in order to pose a favourable comparison between creative and productive 'technical man' and commercial and unproductive 'capitalist man.'[52] In a 1935 essay on 'Technical Civilization in the USA and the USSR,' Hardensett argued that neither country grasped the deeper cultural meanings of technology or the ethos of the master builder.[53] The reactionary modernists saw Germany as the *Kulturnation*, the nation of the geographical and cultural middle, a nation of synthesis which would be an alternative to a materialistic world.

Sombart on Technology, Capitalism and the Jews

Antisemitism, the assault on liberal democracy, and antimodernity were not all of a piece in Germany in this period. Jew-hatred was compatible with a selective embrace of aspects of modernity. As the following recapitulation of Werner Sombart's views makes clear, hostility to the role of the Jews in German history was a key component in the attitude of German illiberalism towards capitalism. Sombart's contribution to the reactionary modernist tradition, from *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911) to *Deutscher Sozialismus* (1934), was to translate social, economic and historical categories into racial categories. More even than the younger members of Weimar's conservative revolution, he translated the right-wing lament over money, abstraction

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51 See *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), p. 185, especially the discussion of Hardensett.

52 H. Hardensett, *Der kapitalistische und der technische Mensch*, Munich 1932; and see also *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 182–185.

53 H. Hardensett, 'Technische Gesittung in USA and UdSSR,' *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, VII (1933/34), pp. 479–503; and see also *Reactionary Modernism*, pp. 181–186.

and commercialism into an attack on *der jüdische Geist* and a defence of supposedly German virtues such as productive labour and technical creativity. He reconciled himself to technological progress by defending what he called the realm of the concrete and the productive against the spread of abstraction and unproductive circulation.

Sombart's cultural strategy for this reconciliation was simple but effective, as is clear from an examination of *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*. He divided the capitalist spirit into two parts. On the one hand, there was the adventurous, entrepreneurial element, infused with Nietszchean will. This was the German side of capitalism. On the other hand, there was a calculating, commercial, bourgeois spirit, which he identified with outsiders, especially the Jews, but also with the 'spirit of Manchester.' Hence, it was not via World War I, but via an older antisemitic tradition in which the Jews were associated with the development of the least attractive aspects of capitalism that Sombart fashioned a suitable marriage between Germans and modern technology. By identifying despicable capitalism, or, later, the despised aspects of modern capitalism with the Jews, Sombart could reconcile himself with German socialism or with aspects of modern capitalism linked to traditional German virtues.[54]

The Sombartian version of the development of capitalism in Europe was as follows.[55] Jewish *Gesellschaft* had replaced Christian *Gemeinschaft*. It was the Jews who had introduced the spirit of acquisition and calculation into a medieval Europe organized around respect for honest labour and the just price. The special contribution of the *jüdische Geist* lay in its establishment of the primacy of economics over politics, culture, religion and morality. Three factors were critical to this unique Jewish contribution to capitalist development: Jewish

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54 Sombart's thesis places Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in an interesting perspective which is far too infrequently considered: namely, as a theory of the development of capitalism which was a direct challenge to the antisemitic arguments of the time. This dimension of Weber's life and work has yet to receive adequate attention from Weber's biographers and commentators. For a very good beginning see J. Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism*, London 1978; D. Landes, 'The Jewish Merchant — Typology and Stereotypology in Germany,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1974); T. Oelsner, 'The Place of the Jews in Economic History as Viewed by German Scholars,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1962), pp. 183–212; P. Mendes-Flohr, 'Werner Sombart's "The Jews and Modern Capitalism": An Analysis of Its Ideological Premises,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1976); and W. Mosse, 'Weber,Sombart, and Beyond,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1979), pp. 3–15.

55 The following discussion is based on W. Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, Leipzig 1911; see also *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 136–151.

social history, religion and psychology. From a social-historical point of view, the Jews were dispersed and had international contacts. As outsiders, they had to be attentive to economic rationality rather than local customs, a situation conducive to a *Fremdenmoral*, a double standard for Jews and non-Jews. Because the Jews were denied the rights of citizenship, they turned their energies from national politics to international economics. Finally, Sombart stressed the importance of Jewish banking in the development of capitalism. In short, European Jewry represented all that was universal, rootless, international and abstract, in contrast to all that was local, rooted, nationalist and concrete. Hostility towards capitalism had found a living target in the Jews.

For Sombart, the Jewish psychology was also highly suited to the development of capitalism. The Jewish religion, claimed Sombart, was a *Verstandeswerk*; it lacked feeling and emotion, while rationalism and intellectualism were its fundamental features. Hence, it had an inherent affinity to capitalism, while posing a direct threat to everything 'irrational and mysterious ... sensuous, artistic and creative.' Not Protestant asceticism but Judaism was the driving force behind the rationalization of the world. 'The whole religious system is basically nothing more than a contract between God and the chosen people.'[56] Rationalistic, nature-dominating, ascetic Judaism was the source of acquisition, calculation and rationalization. As Sombart put it, 'Puritanism is Judaism.'[57]

The Jews, according to Sombart, were 'born representatives of the liberal worldview of the abstract citizen.' They always tried to grasp the world 'with reason, rather than with cold blood.' In Jewish collective psychology, 'paper stands against blood, reason against instinct, concept against perception, abstraction against sensuousness.'[58] For Sombart, the Jews and liberalism were both threats to a well-grounded national identity, because both, in his mind, stood for a universalistic rationalism. But then, so did capitalism. Its spirit was the 'exact counterpart to the Jewish spirit.' In both, 'all qualities are dissolved through a purely quantitative exchange value,' and merchants replace 'multi-colored technical activity.' Both capitalism and Judaism, Sombart wrote, 'express their innermost essence in money.'[59]

With such formulations, Sombart transformed a Marxist theoretical vocabulary of use and exchange value into metaphors of race and

56 Sombart, *Die Juden* (above, note 55), pp. 244–245.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 293.
58 *Ibid.*, pp. 313–319.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 329.

nationality. Instead of proletarians confronting capitalists, Sombart presented German defenders of particularity and concreteness arrayed against Jewish advocates of universality and abstraction. Sombart's identification of the Jews with universalism and abstract reason was evident in his account of the development of European capitalism. The wandering Jews, accustomed to the desert and a nomadic existence, brought the bright light of rationalism to the deep, mysterious, emotive forests of Europe. Capitalism was a product of the 'endless desert' rather than the rooted forest. Desert versus forest, exchange-value versus use-value, merchants versus entrepreneurs, Jews versus Germans, banking versus heavy industry and large landowners, Rathenau versus Krupp — all these were juxtapositions that made plausible a German reconciliation with a capitalism shorn of its Jewish, liberal and rationalist components. If capitalism in the past had stood for the domination of commerce over technology, German anticapitalism was a programme for the ascendancy of technology over commerce, and thus of the integration of technology into a German national revival.

In his wartime tract *Handler und Helden*, Sombart juxtaposed German anticapitalism with British capitalism, and spoke positively of technological progress in terms similar to Spengler's affirmation of a Faustian spirit. In *Deutscher Sozialismus* (1934), Sombart wrote with relief of the passing of the 'economic era,' marked by such misfortunes as *Vergeistung* and *Entseelung*.[60] The outstanding characteristic of this fortunately bygone era was the subordination of politics to economics. At last, things were changing for the better. The new spirit of German socialism was 'nothing other than the renunciation of the economic era as a whole.'[61] In contrast to Marxism, which denied national distinctiveness and merely promoted the domination of economic thinking over politics, Sombart welcomed a German socialism that would fulfill a special German mission in the face of the 'monotony of the East and the West.'[62] Here again, Sombart invoked the image of the desert and the forest. The Germans were now to be delivered from the 'desert of the economic age' by bringing to an end its 'exaggerated intellectualization.' After a century of wandering in the desert of that horrible, soulless time, the Germans would return to the complex — not primitive — forest.[63] They would find plenty of room among those trees for *deutschen technik*.

60 Idem, *Deutscher Sozialismus*, Berlin 1934, pp. 17–20.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
63 *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 160 and 165.

Sombart denied that he was a biological racist, but he saw formidable problems ahead before German socialism could be implemented. The Jewish *Geist* had already infused modern Germany and would continue to exist 'even if every last Jew and Jewish family were to be annihilated.' It was 'sedimented and objectified in a thousand organizations ... above all in our economy.'[64] Somehow, German institutions had to be transformed so that they would no longer be strongholds of the Jewish *Geist*. For Sombart, restoration of a primacy of politics blended an antimaterialist cultural revolution from the right with antisemitism. The authoritarian state, not a proletarian revolution, would carry out this work of redeeming Germany from the liberal, materialist, bourgeois, Jewish era. Sombart's integration of technology into German culture can be epitomized by a reversal of conventional dichotomies that runs through his work. He associated the Jewish *Geist* with exchange value, gold, circulation, abstraction, reason, the desert, intellect, merchants, international socialism, international capitalism and *Zivilisation*. German technology, on the other hand, was bound up with use value, blood, production, concrete immediacy, instinct, forest, soul, *Kultur*, entrepreneurship — and National Socialism.[65]

Sombart's ideas call attention to an important theme expounded by Jacob Talmon: that of the conflict between universalist and particularist elements in European intellectual and cultural history. For Sombart and those who agreed with him, the intellectual assault on liberal democracy was inseparable from hostility to the Jewish *Geist*. This was so because in his mind certain aspects of capitalism, and all aspects of liberal democracy and the Jewish *Geist*, comprised an inseparable whole of universalist, rationalist principles. In coming to the defense of German particularity in the way he did, Werner Sombart demonstrated that rejection of these principles was compatible with a partial embrace of technological modernity. Such an attitude was not restricted to the intellectuals of the antidemocratic right. It was also part of Hitler's legacy.

Reactionary Modernism and Hitler

Hitler, too, belongs to the reactionary modernist tradition. Recent scholarship, and particularly Rainer Zitelmann's *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs* (1987), has offered further evidence

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64 *Ibid.*, p. 195.
65 See *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), p. 151.

of the degree to which Hitler embraced modern technology.[66] Zitelmann's Hitler is an unabashed modernizer, a critic of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism and an admirer of Soviet central planning and of American economic and technological productivity, mass production and consumerism. In one of his *Tischgesprache* during the war, Hitler envisaged a postwar Germany in which millions of homes would be built, technology would liberate the housewife, meals would be delivered, the alarm clock would also boil water, and the household would be automated.[67]

Zitelmann also stresses Hitler the military modernizer, supporter of General Guderian and the advocates of the *Blitzkrieg*. For Zitelmann, Hitler's aspiration to conquer *Lebensraum* in the East was not the result of a 'utopian antimodernism,' or of a mystical rejection of industrial society and a desire to return to agrarian simplicity.[68] Rather, it was part of a very risky but not antimodernist geopolitical strategy aimed at achieving continental hegemony in Eurasia. In this context, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were viewed as areas whose raw material resources would enable the establishment of an autarchic continental empire under German domination, while the food sources of the Ukraine would eliminate German vulnerability to British — and possibly American — naval power. Expansion eastward would avoid war with England, open up space for Germany's expanding population, and lay the groundwork for a successful blow for world domination.[69] It would also open up new markets which could be insulated from external competition as the world became more industrialized and competition for markets grew. *Lebensraum* was a continental German analogue to British and French overseas colonies.

For Zitelmann, 'Hitler's determination of goals did not in any way possess an "antimodernist" character, as research has previously assumed.'[70] Social Darwinism, the rejection of majority rule, and the supposedly scientific justification of racism all belonged to modern ideological currents. Hitler's belief that the liberal democracies — that

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66 R. Zitelmann, *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, Hamburg–New York 1987. Zitelmann's work is now the most extensive study of Hitler's views on modernity, drawing on all of his speeches, essays and private conversations from 1920 to 1945.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 327.

68 On this see H.A. Turner, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus in Deutschland. Studien zum Verhältnis zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Wirtschaft*, Göttingen 1980.

69 See, for example, A. Hitler, *Samtliche Aufzeichnungen: 1905–1924*, Stuttgart 1980, cited in Zitelmann, *Hitler* (above, note 66), pp. 276–277.

70 Zitelmann, *Hitler* (above, note 66), p. 343.

is, England and France — were weak and decadent merely brought him into line with the right-wing intellectuals of the Weimar Republic.[71]

Hitler did not write or speak publicly at great length about technology. In *Mein Kampf*, he divided humankind into three categories: founders, bearers and destroyers of culture, and he assigned these historical roles to the Aryans, the Japanese and the Jews respectively. He defined Aryan culture as a synthesis of 'the Greek spirit and Germanic technology.'[72] He also acknowledged a debt to Gottfried Feder's ideas on 'breaking slavery to interest.' Hitler claimed that this notion was:

> ... a theoretical truth which would inevitably be of immense importance for the future of the German people. The sharp separation of stock-exchange capital from the national economy offered the possibility of opposing the internationalization of the German economy without at the same time menacing the foundations of national self-sufficiency by a struggle against capital.[73]

Where Sombart had attacked the Jewish *Geist*, Hitler turned this cultural revolution into an attack on the Jewish people.

In 1939, Joseph Goebbels, speaking at a Berlin auto show with Hitler on one side and a Volkswagen on the other, offered a succinct summary of the significance of reactionary modernism for Nazism.

> We live in an era of technology. The racing tempo of our century affects all areas of our life. There is scarcely an endeavour that can escape its powerful influence. Therefore, the danger unquestionably arises that modern technology will make men soulless. National Socialism never rejected or struggled against modern technology. Rather, one of its main tasks was to consciously affirm it, *to fill it inwardly with soul*, to discipline it and to place it in the service of our people and their cultural level. National Socialist statements used to refer to the steely romanticism of our century. Today this phrase has attained its full meaning. We live in an age that is both romantic and steellike, that has not lost its depth of feeling. On the contrary, *it has discovered a new romanticism in the results of modern inventions and technology*. While

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71 *Ibid.*, pp. 358–359.
72 A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Boston 1939, p. 318.
73 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

bourgeois reaction was alien to and filled with incomprehension, if not outright hostility, to technology, and while modern sceptics believed the deepest roots of the collapse of European culture lay in it, *National Socialism understood how to take the soulless framework of technology and fill it with the rhythm and hot impulses of our time* (emphasis added).[74]

Here, in the words of the master propagandist, technology was lifted from the world of Western *Zivilisation* and set into that of German *Kultur*. The Fatherland could become both strong and good, soulful and effective, powerful and authentic. A full discussion of the interaction of ideology and power politics in the Third Reich lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, the perception of a reactionary modernist tradition within the Nazi party and government contributes to an explanation of the persistence of ideology and ideologically driven policy within the German dictatorship as it pushed ahead with technological advances.[75]

Hitler, along with the reactionary modernist intellectuals, often spoke of technology as an autonomous force. This conception was evident in Oswald Spengler's application of *Lebensphilosophie* to technology. Technology, wrote Spengler in *Der Mensch und die Technik* (1931), was the outward manifestation of 'an acting, struggling life infused with soul.'[76] The conviction that technology was best understood 'philosphically,' rather than through scientific and technical study, was a recurrent theme among the reactionary modernists. It showed itself in Jünger's depiction of the *Gestalt* of the worker-soldier; in Heidegger's gloom about a Western productivist metaphysic; in Schmitt's enthusiasm about that very same drive towards domination; in Freyer's belief in an inherent technical logic compatible with an authoritarian national community; and in Sombart's argument that technology was the expression of distinctively German rather than Jewish qualities.

Where liberal democracy presupposes a conviction that political events are the product of human agency, this common lament — and after 1945, this common apology — offered a ready alternative explanation for the crimes of the Nazi regime: 'the machine did it.' The swing from enthusiasm to pessimism about technology, accompanied by its continued reification, is a theme in postwar German conservatism

74 J. Goebbels, *Deutsche Technik*, 1939 (speech at the opening of the Berlin Auto Show, February 17, 1939).
75 For comments on reactionary modernism and on ideology and politics in the war years see *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 202–216.
76 O. Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, Munich 1931, p. 6.

that deserves more attention.[77] Indeed, we need more research into the question of whether German conservatism's turn towards a world-weary pessimism with regard to technology was more common after the Second than after the First World War.

Conclusion: The Significance of the Problem of Modernity in National Socialism

Explication of National Socialism's ideological reconciliation between, on the one hand, its cultural and political rejection of key aspects of modernity — political liberalism, cosmopolitanism, racial and religious tolerance — and, on the other, its enthusiasm for modern technology has filled an important lacuna in the historiography of the movement. The introduction of the idea of reactionary modernism into the historical literature has enhanced our understanding of how the Nazi leaders could harmonize their ideological beliefs with the industrialization of Germany after 1933, and thus has contributed to our understanding of the primacy of ideology in the years of war and Holocaust. It serves to clarify differences between German conservatism before 1914 and National Socialism after the First World War. Reactionary modernism offered a sense of élan and purpose to its advocates, who thought they were riding the wave of the future by replacing obsolete, old-fashioned, no-longer-modern liberalism.

Furthermore, the reactionary modernist tradition, taken as a whole — though not throughout all of its dimensions and themes — was unique in the range and depth of its contributions to ideology, and in the number and prominence of the contributors. Unlike similar currents of thought in Britain and France, it was part of an effort to define the German national identity, which was still uncertain owing to the simultaneity of the problems facing the 'belated nation' from the late nineteenth century onwards. The apparently coherent and powerful metaphors employed by this ideology played an important role in the political battles that raged at the end of the Weimar period over which strand of Germany's network of continuities would win out.

Recognizing the mixture of unreason and technology in Nazi ideology also draws our attention to the significance of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for Hitler's strategy of attempting to achieve continental autarchy and liberation from British and American sea

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77 See Muller, *The Other God* (above, note 40); and O. Ulrich, *Technik und Herrschaft*, Frankfurt a/M 1977.

power. The 'wild East' was to be the location for playing out anti-industrial fantasies and racist policies of extermination, but it was also part of a truly modern strategic plan.

National Socialism, in short, was not primarily a revolt against modernity. It was much more and much worse than that. Jacob Talmon kept a proper perspective on the issue when he noted that National Socialism's assault on the Jews and its celebration of an Aryan racial elite were pagan rejections of a central idea of Western civilization which originated in Jerusalem with the appearance of monotheism: not, as Heidegger suggested, the domination of reason over nature, but the idea of one humanity comprised of individuals, each of whom has rights and dignity by virtue of being human. At times, the debate about modernity and antimodernity in National Socialism has lost sight of this point. National Socialism did not just reject modernity as it developed in the wake of the French and industrial revolutions. The victory of National Socialism would have meant the end of five thousand years of Western civilization, begun in Jerusalem and secularized in Athens. Nazism, of course, was also a product of Western civilization and its long-standing traditions of Christian antisemitism. No less than German history, Western history is also a network of continuities. The Nazis, heirs and modernizers of one strand in that network, sought to destroy all the others.

The reactionary modernist tradition and the intellectual assault on liberal democracy in Germany claimed that technology, not human beings, determined the history of the Third Reich. It was a false but potent self-fulfilling prophecy. To have made liberal democracy appear obsolete, to have reconciled German nationalism to modern technology, to have given the Nazis the conviction that they could be both powerful and men of soul — in short, to have claimed to represent modernity while turning against the dominant values of the Western tradition — this was the truly disgraceful accomplishment of the reactionary modernists and of the ideologists and practitioners of Nazism. Compared with this profound rejection of the West, the matter of technology was an important but clearly secondary issue. But as a cultural-political factor in the practical struggle for power in the closing days of the Weimar Republic and during the years of preparation for renewed war, reactionary modernism was not unimportant. In the moments of decision, reactionary modernist ideology and ideologues played a role in advancing the continuities in German history which culminated in the German dictatorship of 1933 to 1945. It is one of the distinctive and sometimes unappreciated contributions of intellectual

historians like Jacob Talmon to have reminded us of the eminently practical and politically consequential impact of ideas on history.

Nazism was partly a movement of reactionary modernism. It found many ways of reconciling itself to modern technology, but never to the idea of a common humanity. The Nazis were heirs to a powerful Western tradition of Christian antisemitism, and in this sense their appearance was possible only in the context of Western and German history. The radicalization of this long-standing tradition, and not hostility to industrialism or liberalism alone, was the core of Nazi ideology and practice. Just as the Nazis developed certain themes in the network of continuities in German and Western history, they could be defeated, after 1933, only by other states where the idea of a common humanity had not succumbed to the German revolt against the continuities that won out in the West.

Steven E. Aschheim

Nietzsche and the German Radical Right
1914–1933

For the German radical right of 1918–1933 — a few dissenting
voices notwithstanding — Nietzsche was the most authoritative
and inspirational source. We need waste little time establishing this
centrality. As its sympathetic chronicler Armin Mohler put it, the
'conservative revolution' would have been 'unthinkable' without
Nietzsche.[1] In his protean works the new right discovered a remarkably
plastic, almost inexhaustible source for enunciating a radical rather
than traditional right-wing view of the world, and for locating both
its enemies and its positive ideals. In 1931 Friedrich Hielscher, an
active publicist on the radical right, summed up Nietzsche's multiple
functions for this political universe: 'Nietzsche,' he wrote, 'stands as
questioner, as fighter, as the solitary one. He stands for the Reich as
protector of the past, as crusher of the present, as transformer of the
future.'[2]

This link between the right and Nietzsche was by no means
historically or politically obvious. Prior to 1914, Nietzsche was generally
anathema to conservatives, ruling elites and nationalists alike.[3] Despite
the frenetic efforts of Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth (and the Nietzsche
Archives, which were under her control) to endow Nietzsche with
a patriotic pedigree,[4] most establishment circles continued to regard

1   A. Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932 — Ein Handbuch*,
    Darmstadt 1972, pp. 29 and 87.
2   F. Hielscher, *Das Reich*, Berlin 1931, p. 200.
3   A. J. Mayer (in *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, New York
    1981, Chap. 5) presents Nietzsche as a chief prop of Europe's ruling aristocratic elite
    in its need to bolster a shaky old order in the face of democratizing threats. There
    is, in fact, almost no documentary evidence to support this assertion. Before 1914
    Nietzsche was, above all, the voice of radical anti-establishmentarianism of all kinds,
    and certainly not a tool of the ruling elites. Mayer's argument is given a semblance
    of credibility only by the total absence of documentary footnotes!
4   For an account of these efforts see H.F. Peters, *Zarathustra's Sister: The Case of Elisabeth
    and Friedrich Nietzsche*, New York 1985.

him as subversive and antinationalist; his views were attributed to his undisputed insanity. He was a radical whose anti-Christian, anti-German, pro-Jewish and transnational European sentiments rendered him both dangerous and entirely unrespectable. So, too, was the highly individualist and internationalist company which then championed him: libertarians and cultural critics of the Second Reich, anarchists and left-wing dissidents, bohemian immoralists and expressionist *Übermenschen* affecting to be laws unto themselves.[5] Count Harry Kessler recounts in his diary that young people from conservative homes who had read Nietzsche were 'locked up with a priest for six months.'[6]

In order to establish the novel convergence of Nietzsche and the right, then, it was necessary to transform and reshape both. On the one hand, the unpatriotic and unrespectable thinker had, casuistically, to be nationalized and domesticated to the Germanic frame. At the same time, the right had to undergo radicalization, to be 'modernized' and loosed from its traditional moorings — its associations with the Church, the monarchy and the hereditary aristocracy — and to be provided with an oppositionalist future-oriented dynamic whose agenda could then partly be shaped and partly enriched by selective scavenging of the Nietzschean universe. Both transformations were, of course, the direct result of distinct historical circumstances.[7] The German Nietzsche and the new right emerged from the crucible of the First World War, the upheavals of its aftermath and the discontents of the Weimar Republic. Both provided alternatives not only to the liberal-democratic worldview but also to traditional conservatism. Both, as we shall see, contributed to and reflected the increasingly brutalized atmosphere of the time.

5 R. Hinton Thomas (in *Nietzsche in German Politics and Society 1890–1918*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), has argued that Nietzsche's pre-1918 influence was almost totally in the progressive mould. I have argued elsewhere (in my book *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990*, Berkeley 1992) that the influence was politically open-ended and radical, usable for both left- and right-wing purposes, 'progressive' as well as 'reactionary.' Indeed, it is increasingly rendering both those categories irrelevant!

6 See the entry of Saturday, 22 October 1927, in Count Harry Kessler, *The Diaries of a Cosmopolitan 1918–1937* (English transl. and ed. C. Kessler), London 1971.

7 For the sake of historical accuracy it should be clear that we are referring to a tendency, a cluster, rather than an iron-clad law. Thus, even before 1914 there were hints of the right-wing Nietzsche that was later to emerge, just as there was always some opposition within various radical-right circles once the annexation had been made. See my *Nietzsche Legacy* (above, note 5), Chaps. 3, 4 and 6.

It is hardly surprising that the transformation of Nietzsche into a quintessential prophet of *Deutschtum*, his location within a Germanic frame, should have been an unfolding product of the First World War. As the guns boomed, Nietzsche's works assumed a fresh relevance. During these years the philosopher's works and anthologies were diffused *en masse* for the first time. *Also Sprach Zarathustra* was consecrated into a kind of holy national document and distributed in the hundreds of thousands to soldiers at the front. Reality itself seemed to take on Nietzschean form. Nietzsche's celebration of combat and its regenerative capacities, his intoxicated praise for war and martial virtues, for heroism and courage, and for 'living dangerously' were themes hammered home by countless publicists and mediators of the Nietzsche war myth.

I have elsewhere described in detail the widespread diffusion and the casuistic process by which Nietzsche was integrated into the German nation through war.[8] Let us point out here simply that the later radical-right annexation of Nietzsche was facilitated not only by his wartime nationalization but also by the transmutation of the warrior virtues and the other individual virtues he had praised into collective Germanic values. At least at the beginning of the war, these were broadly shared national sentiments and not the monopoly of any one political tendency. As one contributor to the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* wrote in 1914, Nietzsche's 'famous and defamed "*Übermensch*" bears a thoroughly German imprint.'[9]

Also Sprach Zarathustra was probably never as popular at the grass-roots level as proponents of the Nietzsche myth proclaimed. But what is of cultural significance in relation to our present theme is Nietzsche's new national legitimacy and centrality in the realm of public myth-making and political symbolic mobilization. This broader process provided the natural backdrop to his annexation by the nascent radical right. To be sure, it was only after 1918 that the new right emerged as an obvious force in German politics. Nevertheless, during the war signs of its presence began to dot the cultural landscape. Already in 1915 esoteric journals such as *The Panther* were espousing a proto-Fascist worldview, with Nietzsche as its key figure. Nietzsche, so ran the argument, was the embodiment of Germanic virtues, but up

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8 See my 'Zarathustra in the Trenches: The Nietzsche Myth and World War I,' in *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism in Europe and America*, Jerusalem 1986.

9 A. Messer, 'Nietzsche und der Krieg — Zum 70 Geburtstag des Philosophen: 15 October,' *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 15 October 1914.

to now this had systematically been hidden from public consciousness by Jews who had monopolized his mediation within Germany. They had distorted the German Nietzsche into a nihilist and internationalist, in consonance with their own destructive interests.[10] Once this was understood, the real meaning of Nietzsche's ideas would become clear. He had preached a national cultural totality based upon the fusion of aesthetic and warrior values, in opposition to the values of a splintered liberal-rationalist and moralistic world. Only on the basis of struggle and unbroken strength could such a desired totality be created.[11]

Nietzsche was a major resource for the creation of charged and changing political meanings as events unfolded. At first he was the great mobilizer, providing the heroic rationale for rushing into battle. He was, as one commentator put it, the 'philosopher of the world war' who had educated a whole generation towards 'a life-endangering honesty, towards a contempt for death ... to a sacrifice on the altar of the whole, towards heroism and quiet, joyful greatness.'[12]

It is instructive, however, to note that the most sophisticated and passionate right-wing constructions of Nietzsche to emerge from the war — Thomas Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* and Ernst Bertram's *Nietzsche: An Attempt at a Mythology* — appeared in 1918, when German triumphalism had receded, defeat was imminent and national insecurity at a peak. In both of these works Nietzsche emerges as the central axis around which the attempt to provide a consolatory and galvanizing account of the moment revolved. He was at once the embodiment of unique German values — indeed, of the torn German condition itself — and the central testament to its still-evolving nature and the ongoing challenge of its uncompleted mission. Both works were irreconcilably opposed to shallow Western democratic civilization. For the virulently antidemocratic, anti-Western Thomas Mann of the First World War (to whom our *ex post facto* knowledge of the 'good' Thomas Mann should not blind us), Nietzsche was the central justifying figure around whom he built his arguments. 'The colossal manliness of his [Nietzsche's] soul, his antifeminism, his opposition to democracy,' Mann wrote approvingly '— what could be more German? What

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10 See, for instance, Lenore Ripke-Kühn, 'Nietzsche der ewige Deutsche,' *Deutschlands Erneurung*, VI (1919), pp. 420 and 424.
11 Lenore Ripke-Kühn, 'Nietzsches Kulturanschauung,' *Der Panther*, III (1915). See also her 'Nietzsches Willenserziehung,' *Der Panther* (April 1917).
12 T. Kappstein, 'Nietzsche der Philosoph des Weltkriegs — Zu seinem 70. Geburtstag am 15 Oktober,' *Strassburger Post*, 1028 (1914).

could be more German than his contempt for "modern ideas," for eighteenth-century ideas, for "French ideas" which, he insisted, had English origins?'[13]

Mann's antidemocratic rhetoric was even more virulent than Bertram's. Nevertheless, there is a difference in kind between the two which is symptomatic of the distinction between the old and the emerging new right. Mann's *Reflections*, I would argue, is a transitional document, torn by contradictions, full of ambivalence, but nevertheless moulded by and committed to the vanishing old order. For all his venom, Mann's vision remains quietist, ironic and profoundly conservative. He explicitly rejects radicalism. 'Radicalism,' he wrote 'is nihilism. The ironist is conservative.'[14] Mann's Nietzsche embodies complex and contradictory qualities, is himself the incarnation of the conflict between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. But Mann has no difficulty in choosing the *Kultur* side of Nietzsche, his ironic, psychological and ethical traits, while rejecting the 'power' and 'nihilist-aesthetic' components. It was precisely these latter elements which a hardened radical right was soon to adopt in the Weimar Republic: the last thing that interested them was irony.

While Mann was unable to resolve the contradictions he felt so acutely as the historical epoch drew to a close, Bertram pointed forward, resolving all these inner conflicts by integrating Nietzsche into the framework of a rounded and positive *Völkisch* mythos. Standing at the threshold of a new age, Bertram's work was absolutely crucial to the nationalist appropriation of Nietzsche[15] and his transfiguration into what Bertram called the climactic German, the *Überdeutscher*.[16] The key to a regenerated breakthrough was the Nietzschean power of will. Here both Nietzschean ideas and Nietzsche himself — as heroic personality — were fused into the aspirations of the *Volk*.

As Bertram put it, Nietzsche represented 'the self-knowledge of the *Volk* at the moment ... of its greatest inner danger — and [he] is

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13 T. Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (English transl. by W.D. Morris), New York, 1983, p. 57.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 419.

15 Bertram's categories and version penetrated not only explicitly radical or *Völkisch* circles; Nietzsche appeared this way all the time in popular literature. See for instance C. Hotzel, 'Nietzsches deutsche Aufgabe,' *Der Türmer*, XXVIII, no. 10, (1926). Note that this was part of an issue devoted almost entirely to Nietzsche.

16 E. Bertram, *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie*, Berlin, 1918, p. 250. This theme is of course a major leitmotif of the book.

simultaneously an awakening and development of the saving instincts and the saving will.'[17]

Moreover, Bertram's Nietzsche exemplified the frankly irrationalist epistemology which was to become a hallmark of the Weimar radical right. Like the elitist, antidemocratic Stefan George *Kreis*[18], of which he was an associate, Bertram insisted that history had to be made into an explicitly legend-creating, myth-making task. Objectivity was both unattainable and undesirable; only intuition and activating knowledge were of value. 'All events,' Bertram declared, 'strive towards image, everything living towards legend, all reality towards Mythos.'[19] His *Nietzsche* was an explicit attempt to create a 'mythology of the last great German ... in the historical moment of the present.'

In the post-war context, of course, the cult of Nietzsche no longer functioned as a means of fighting and coping with a war in progress. Now it became a shaping force in the radical right's most crucial energizing tool: the retrospective myth of the war experience, the *Kriegserlebnis*. This was to become the guiding norm by which political reality would be judged and reshaped. The war and its immediate aftermath had not only transformed Nietzsche and his place in German political discourse; it had done the same for the right, and in an interdependent manner. The old tension between the establishment right and the subversive Nietzsche was wiped out. Both were now radical dissidents — utterly disdainful of the status quo and in search of a revolutionary but still unclassifiable future.

Nietzsche provided essential elements for the great themes that distinguished the new from the traditional Bismarckian and Wilhelmian right: the insistence on activism and a self-propelling dynamic; the masculine, 'soldierly' nationalist ethic,[20] explicitly contrasted with the static patriotism of the pre-war period;[21] the virulent critique of Weimar liberalism, Marxism and mass culture; and the contours for the heroic new man of the future.

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
18 See the excellent discussion of the George *Kreis* in W. Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*, Cambridge, U.K., 1988, secs. 11 and 12.
19 Bertram, *Nietzsche* (above, note 16), p. 6.
20 For a good discussion of these themes see K. Prümm, *Die Literatur des Soldatischen Nationalismus der 20er Jahre (1918–1933): Gruppenideologie und Epochenproblematik 1*, Kronberg, 1974.
21 See E. Schmahl, *Der Aufstieg der nationalen Idee*, Berlin–Leipzig, n.d., pp. 143–144. This is a Nazi work which held that Nietzsche anticipated all the expressions of the new nationalism already in his own time; see p. 103.

Perhaps most critically, Nietzsche furnished the right with a most prolific arsenal for its politicized *Lebensphilosophie*, that transvalued vision of a post-rationalist, post-Christian, post-bourgeois social order beyond good and evil. Moreover, Nietzsche provided vitalist criteria for the related positive and negative ideals, for identifying healthy, 'life-affirming' forces and diagnosing those decadent and degenerate 'anti-life' (*Lebensfeindlich*) elements deemed unworthy of propagation or even of life itself.

In a period of radical dislocation and polarization, detailed blueprints for the ideal Nietzschean future order turned up everywhere. Friedrich Mess's massive 1930 work entitled *Nietzsche: The Lawgiver* was only the most systematic of many such attempts. 'Just as canonical law derived from the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers,' Mess proclaimed, 'so must the *Lex futurana Europearum* be built upon Nietzsche's wisdom.'[22] In such commentaries — and certainly in later Nazi ones — a new conception of law and morality was formulated. Nietzschean jurisprudence, Mess insisted, was not abstract; the law which would guide it was not a codification of immutable 'reason,' but a function of what enhanced 'life.' Like many others, Mess, of course, nationalized Nietzsche's vitalism. Both law and morality were represented as instruments in the life of the *Volk*, placed at the service of the nation's (or the race's) needs and development. The struggle for national self-assertion and for the heightening of power was the source of both law and morality, which shifted according to changing needs. Nietzschean law was dynamic, not static.[23] In every such rendering, Nietzschean society was presented in antitranscendent terms: immanent, re-naturalized, de-moralized.

This anticultural Nietzsche immediately rendered anachronistic Hermann Hesse's 1919 attempt to evoke a different understanding of the philosopher. His 'Zarathustra's Return' was couched in the cultivated pre-war language of *Bildung*, appealing to German youth in terms of that tradition of independent and critical thought.[24] But in the highly politicized, polarized post-war climate of the Weimar Republic, the old non-conformist, libertarian and internationalist Nietzsche had

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22 F. Mess, *Nietzsche: Der Gesetzgeber*, Leipzig 1930. The quote appears on p. vii.
23 See, for example, K. Kassler, *Nietzsche und das Recht*, Munich 1941.
24 H. Hesse, 'Zarathustra's Return: A Word to German Youth (1919),' in R.C. Solomon, *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New York 1973. In a similar vein, E. Thiel (in *Die Generation ohne Männer*, Berlin 1932) applied what he viewed as high Nietzschean standards to the political and intellectual leaders of his time and found them wanting.

lost most of his resonance. A quite different Zarathustra of the right had already replaced him.[25]

The new Zarathustra must be seen within the context of a certain brutalization that spilled over from the war and became an inbuilt part of post-war attitudes. This post-war brutalization — the cheapening of life, the infusion of greater linguistic and physical violence into the public realm, the tendency to depersonalization — may have been a generalized European phenomenon, but in Germany it was exacerbated by defeat, revolution and the ongoing socio-economiç crisis. It increasingly provided the space for political extremes (especially the right) to create an alternative political culture and determine the terrain of political debate and action.[26]

It goes without saying that the radical right and the process of brutalization would have emerged without Nietzsche. But Nietzsche supplied both the philosophical legitimacy and the larger vision by which such sentiments could be channelled and given political shape. Of course, this involved a constant process of selective scavenging and reinterpretation, a casting of Nietzsche into the required brutalized mould. This newly constructed Nietzsche was also a product of the times, a reflection of his hardened makers.

From 1918 to 1933 there were over 550 clubs and 530 journals associated with the right.[27] In political party terms the radical right, ranging from the supposedly conservative *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* to the Nazis, was never monolithic; it was never limited to any single, coherent political party. It was a malleable sensibility, compatible with a large number of organizational affiliations and ideological preferences. The Nietzschean impulse played a guiding role throughout, and extended even to most of the more modest and conservative variations of the right. To be sure, there were always some on the extreme right who remained suspicious.[28] Nevertheless, Nietzsche remained crucial

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25 Left-wing and avant-garde intellectuals were quite aware of this process, which they viewed with (helpless) consternation. For some examples see note 55 of my 'Zaruthustra in the Trenches' (above, note 8).

26 See G.L. Mosse, 'The Brutalization of German Politics,' in *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, New York 1990, Chap. 8.

27 A. Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution* (above, note 1), pp. 539–554.

28 See K. Kynast, 'Der Fall Nietzsche im Lichte rassenkundlicher Betracthung,' *Die Sonne: Monatschrift für nordliche Weltanschaaung und Lebensgestaltung auf wissenschaftlicher Grundlage*, II (1925). Those of the 'northern race,' Kynast warned, had to be wary of the *ressentiment* views of this 'Mongolmischling.' See especially pp. 534–535.

for numerous *Völkisch* circles;[29] for Dionysian irrationalists like Ludwig Klages[30] and the expressionist Gottfried Benn;[31] for the cultural and political regenerationists associated with Eugen Diedrichs[32] and Hans Freyer;[33] for various offshoots of the German youth movement; and even for elitist Christian radical rightists such as Edgar Jung.[34]

Within the radical-right construction, let us note in passing the pivotal role played by the official home of the Nietzsche-cult, the Weimar archives.[35] It is aptly summed up by what a dismayed observer noted in his diary in 1932: 'Inside the Archive everyone from the doorkeeper to the head is a Nazi.'[36] But Nietzsche's penetration into German political culture was always far wider and more spontaneous than its institutionalized expression. Let us, therefore, return to an analysis of the most radical and symptomatic of its post-war eruptions.

We shall begin with positive notions and ideal types. Various pre-war avant-garde Nietzscheans had glorified creative struggle for its own sake. What previously had been the fantasies of poets now became practice. Contemporary political circumstances provided real outlets for the unleashing of violence. In a sense the *Freikorps*, the soldiers who fought on after the war had ended, was the earliest political concretization of an updated (nationalist-nihilist) Nietzschean praxis. It seemed to embody Zarathustra's cry, endlessly repeated during this period: 'You say that it is the good cause that hallows even war? I say

29 See, for instance, P. Schulze-Berghof, 'Nietzsches historisch-mythische Sendung,' *Der Volkserzieher*, XXXIV (1930); H. Kern, 'Nietzsche und die romantischen Theorien des Unbewussten,' *Zeitschrift für Menschenkunde*, III (1927).
30 See *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, Leipzig 1926. For a discussion of Klages's complex relation to Nietzsche see my *Nietzsche Legacy* (above, note 5), Chap. 2.
31 For an example of Benn's pre-Nazi reflections see his 'Akademie-Rede,' in *Gesammelte Werke*, I, Wiesbaden–Munich 1977. For a detailed examination of Benn and Nietzsche see my *Nietzsche Legacy* (above, note 5), Chaps. 3 and 8.
32 See E. Diedrichs, 'Das Kommen des Dritten Reiches,' and 'Entwicklungsphasen der freideutschen Jungend' both in *Die Tat*, X. On Diedrichs and other related figures see my 'After the Death of God: Varieties of Nietzschean Religion,' *Nietzsche-Studien*, XVII (1988).
33 For an excellent overview see J.Z. Muller, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, Princeton 1987. Although Muller discusses the Nietzschean impulse in Freyer's thinking, I believe an even stronger case can be made for it, and for its relevant transmutation.
34 E. Jung, *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigkeiten: Ihr Zerfall und ihre Ablösung durch ein Neues Reich*, Berlin 1927. One could not wish for a more Nietzschean title!
35 See the account by H.F. Peters in *Zarathustra's Sister* (above, note 4), Chaps. 22, 23 and 24.
36 See the entry for Sunday, 7 August 1932, in Kessler. *Diaries* (above, note 6), p. 426.

unto you: it is the good war that hallows any cause.'[37] Members of the *Freikorps* described themselves in almost caricaturistically Nietzschean terms: a band of ruthless men, whose task it was to 'become hard' and 'live dangerously,' enamoured of struggle and action for its own sake. Intensely nationalistic and anti-Bolshevist, they nevertheless regarded themselves as free of ideology. 'What we wanted we didn't know,' wrote Ernst von Salomon, the minstrel of the *Freikorps* and one of Walther Rathenau's murderers, 'and what we knew we didn't want. War and adventure, insurrection and destruction and an unknown, agonizing ... yearning.'[38] They portrayed themselves as a uniquely constituted community, a novel form of human bonding, steeled by the trench experience. The post-war era, Salomon declared in 1930, had 'created a unique new race, a new type of warrior. No order can tolerate them, but none can be created without them.'[39]

In 1930 Werner Best, later to become an important functionary in the extermination of European Jewry, formulated this Nietzschean vision in terms of what he believed would be the judicial norm of the future. War, he wrote, was not a sin against nature, nor was there, as the liberal-Enlightenment rationalist would have it, a universal law transcending the rights of nations. War did not contradict life but was, indeed, its most essential element. Life, after all, had no ultimate goal — and here Best invoked Nietzsche's dictum (§ 1062) from *The Will to Power*: 'If the world had a goal, it must have been reached.' What remained was only the eternal, dynamic principle of struggle and the need, in the face of this nihilistic predicament, to adopt an attitude of 'heroic realism'[40]. This attitude of overcoming the nihilism of the age through will formed the centre of Alfred Bäumler's 1931 Nazi transmogrification of Nietzsche into the thinker of Great Politics, whose will to power ushered in the great post-liberal, post-bourgeois age.[41] It also formed the philosophical basis of Heidegger's attachment to the radical right during the early 1930s.[42]

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37 *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: 'On War and Warriors,' in W. Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche*, New York 1968, p. 159.
38 E. von Salomon, *Die Geächteten*, Gütersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1930, p. 83.
39 Idem, 'Der verlorene Haufe,' in E. Jünger (ed.), *Krieg und Krieger*, Berlin 1930; see especially pp. 122–123.
40 W. Best, 'Der Krieg und das Recht,' in Jünger (ed.), *Krieg und Krieger* (above, note 39).
41 A. Bäumler, *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker*, Leipzig 1931.
42 For more on this see Jürgen Habermas, 'Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective,' *Critical Inquiry*, XV (1989), especially pp. 438–440.

The multiple calls for a tough, masculine elite to solve the post-war predicament were saturated with Nietzschean vocabulary. Oswald Spengler's unfolding vision of a neo-barbarian elite, his 1931 call for a 'beast of prey' (*Raubtier*) whose will had not yet been castrated by the feminizing impact of bourgeois and Christian morality, was only one variation on this theme.[43]

Yet, we should note, the Weimar radical right tempered this appropriation in two characteristic and interrelated ways. First, it fundamentally transformed pre-war Nietzschean individualism. The *Übermensch*, Nietzsche's 'new man,' ceased to be solitary or even to possess unique characteristics; he was almost entirely typologized, cast in prototypical rather than individual form. Secondly, Nietzsche's dynamic was not only depersonalized but also regimented and subordinated to the requirements of a tightly controlled nation. These framing processes were essential before Nietzsche could be made serviceable — even, apparently, indispensable — to the radical right.

These tendencies are best illustrated by Ernst Jünger. On the one hand, he articulated above all a vision of the naked Nietzschean dynamic, of combat waged almost as an aesthetic and redemptive masculine form of creation. Moreover, he transposed the thrill of violence, of becoming hard and living dangerously, from the battlefield into civilian life.[44] But, like all German radical-right Nietzscheans, he first poured the post-war Nietzschean man projected by his aesthetic into an abstract mould and then tamed him within larger, containable frameworks. When Jünger's Zarathustra emerged from the trenches, his unique face was transfigured into an interchangeable cog. There is little to choose between Jünger's conception and Hitler's physical description of the newly emergent storm pioneers who would constitute the elite of central Europe. This is an abstract new race, characterized not only by its tough will[45] but also by its stereotyped physiognomy: 'Lithe, lean, sinewy body, strong-featured face, eyes hardened by a thousand shocks under the helmet [in battle].'[46]

Here the individualistic Nietzschean dynamic recedes. Jünger increasingly places his fighter within the national and industrial frame,

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43 Beginning with his *Decline of the West* (1918), Spengler gradually developed and radicalized this theme. On the *Raubtier* see his *Der Mensch und die Technik*, Munich 1931 (reprinted 1971), pp. 10–17.

44 E. Jünger, 'Über die Gefahr,' *Widerstand*, III (1931).

45 On the theme of will see idem, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, Berlin 1922, pp. 13 and 76.

46 Quoted in Prümm, *Die Literatur* (above, note 20), p. 155.

transforming him into the metahistorical *Gestalt* of 'the worker,' in a totally mobilized society where the energy and dynamism of war is defused within a disciplined, obedient subordination.[47]

That subordination and the alternative 'national socialism'[48] offered not only by Adolf Hitler but also by diverse members of the radical right — such as Jünger, Werner Sombart, Moeller van den Bruck and Oswald Spengler — was inevitably formulated within the framework of an antihumanist and activist Nietzschean will to power. Spengler put it very clearly indeed: Socialism was '*not* a system of compassion, humanity, peace and kindly care, but one of will to power. Any other reading of it is illusory. The aim is through and through imperialist; welfare, but welfare in the expansive sense, the welfare not of the diseased but of the energetic man who ought to be given and must be given *freedom to do*, regardless of obstacles of wealth, birth and tradition.'[49]

Jeffrey Herf has demonstrated brilliantly how the Weimar right incorporated the industrial-technological dimension into its worldview.[50] Nietzsche — despite the utterly unindustrialized Zarathustrian mountain landscape — was one of its major prophets. Georg Förster's 1930 book, *Machtwille und Maschinewelt*, is the best example of a sustained, sophisticated attempt to establish Nietzsche as the philosopher of the technical and even the post-technical age (and thus of the next century as well!). Förster's explicit aim was to modernize and collectivize the Nietzschean will to power within an industrial frame, tying the birth of the *Übermensch* to a creative mastery of technology and the possibility of planetary control.[51] Jünger's worker, similarly, has nothing to do with traditional *Stände* or class in the nineteenth-century sense. He is a new man who experiences himself not as an end, but only as a means, a bearer of the elemental will to power.[52]

Nietzsche fed not only into the right's positive revolutionary images of a rejuvenated humanity, but also into its anti-types. As we have

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47 See Jünger's important work, 'Der Arbeiter,' in his *Werke*, VI: *Essays II*, Stuttgart 1964.

48 See my 'Nietzschean Socialism — Left and Right, 1890–1933,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXIII (1988).

49 O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, I: *Form and Actuality* (English transl. by C.F. Atkinson), New York 1980, pp. 361–362.

50 See his *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge, U.K., 1984.

51 G. Förster, *Machtwille und Maschinewelt: Deutung unser Zeit*, Potsdam 1930, p. 12.

52 Jünger, 'Der Arbeiter' (above, note 47), pp. 118 ff., and the section on 'Die Ablousung des Bürgerlichen Individuums durch den Typus des Arbeiters.'

already noted, a politicized Nietzschean *Lebensphilosophie* could easily be employed to identify *ressentiment*, anti-life enemies, and to prescribe appropriately ruthless measures for dealing with them. It possessed a new salience in a dislocated society where the notions of regeneration and degeneration had become common coinage and where the demand for corrective action grew ever more shrill.

The better-known figures of the radical right, theoreticians such as Spengler, Jung, Moeller van den Bruck and so on, usually labelled the enemy in abstract, archetypical form and left it at that. Jünger's omnipresent 'bourgeois' is the obvious example. At the same time, however, there was a veritable explosion of the lesser-known *Rassehygiene*, antisemitic and anti-Communist literature which was diffused — not only by the Nazis — at all levels of Weimar society. It turned up in the form of crude street pamphlets, in middle-class homes and even in the supposedly elevated world of scholarship. The degree to which much of it was channelled by the Nietzschean theme — in either explicit or implicit form — is remarkable. To be sure, many of these sentiments would doubtless have appeared in any case. But Nietzsche's rationale gave them a broader, shaping meaning and a certain legitimacy. For those who needed it, Nietzsche supplied a vocabulary which rendered Weimar's dehumanizing impulses *salonfähig*.

The new practice of labelling political enemies, unwanted outsiders and deviants as *Untermenschen* provides one linguistic example of such dehumanization. The word itself derived from the late eighteenth century; Nietzsche used it infrequently and in a quite different context. In the Weimar Republic, however, its brutalized connotations and connections to a related Nietzschean *Übermensch* and to broader anti-egalitarian themes were clear. (These connections were brought to their logical conclusion under the Nazis a few years later.[53])

Vitalist immoralism was eminently suited to the postwar groundswell advocating racist and eugenic options. Nietzschean gutter literature such as Ernst Mann's 1920 pamphlet, *The Morality of Strength*, typifies this trend in its most blatant (though certainly not its only) form. 'What is good,' wrote Mann, 'is what increases the mental and physical strength of [the] people. Evil is that which weakens [such] strength.'[54] Here Nietzsche's exhortations to prevent the procreation

53 For a discussion of the *Untermensch* and its various uses see A. Bein, 'The Jewish Parasite,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, X (1964), especially pp. 27–28.
54 E. Mann, *Die Moral der Kraft*, Weimar 1920, p. 7.

of various 'anti-life' elements, his advocacy of euthanasia,[55] is restated in as crude a form as possible. 'All the weaklings and the sick,' Mann wrote, 'must be exterminated.' This included tuberculosis and mental patients, cripples of all kinds and the blind. All those who lent society a pessimistic tone and were unable to contribute to its life would have to succumb. Their destruction was the precondition for the development of a healthy, strong people.[56] 'Manly men' were the most valuable members of the *Volk* — thus, homosexuals had to be wiped out.[57] As in nature, the human 'beast of prey' (*Raubtier*) had to act as the 'Gesundheitspolizei'; the exterminatory instinct of the strong would have to reassert its morality[58] over its weak, *ressentiment* underminers.[59]

Of course, brutalization brought with it both an extension and a radicalization of the scope of exclusion. The title of Franz Haiser's 1926 Nazi work, *The Jewish Question from the Standpoint of Master Morality*, is self-explanatory. It advocated a literalized and operationalized reading of what Nietzsche had said in *the Antichrist* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* about the Jewish denaturalization of all values, of morality itself.[60] The degeneration and racial chaos of Weimar Germany and of Europe was the result of Jewish rule and of the concomitant weakening of the *Herrenmensch*. The return of the original *Herrenmensch* and his

55 There is no shortage of such passages in Nietzsche's works. 'The Biblical prohibition "Thou shalt not kill" is a piece of naïveté,' he wrote, 'compared with the seriousness of the prohibition of life to decadents: "Thou shalt not procreate!" — Life itself recognizes no solidarity, no "equal rights," between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism: one must excise the latter — or the whole will perish. — Sympathy for decadents, equal rights for the ill-constituted — that would be the profoundest immorality, that would be antinature itself as morality.' See *The Will to Power* (English transl. by W. Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale), New York 1968, § 734 (Summer-Fall, 1888), p. 389, but also §§ 246 and 740; *The Gay Science* (English transl. and commentary by W. Kaufmann), New York 1974, § 73, p. 129; 'On Free Death,' in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (above, note 37); *Twilight of the Idols*, § 36 ('Morality for Physicians'), in Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (above, note 37), pp. 536–538; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, published together with *Ecce Homo*, ed. with commentary by W. Kaufmann, New York 1969, Third Essay, §§ 13 and 14, pp. 120–125.
56 Mann, *Die Moral der Kraft* (above, note 54), pp. 43 ff.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
58 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
59 The work never once mentions Nietzsche, but his categories and his spirit permeate it from beginning to end. This was recognized by its reviewers: see the comments reprinted — without supporting details — at the back of the book.
60 Franz Haiser, *Die Judenfrage vom Standpunkt der Herrenmoral: Rechtsvölkische und linksvölkische Weltanschauung*, Leipzig 1926. See also Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §§ 24 and 25, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (above, note 37), pp. 592–595.

elevation to the status of world *Übermensch* was a biological imperative. In order to achieve this, a kind of massive Nietzschean confrontation between Aryan Nordics and their enemies, Jewish and other, was necessary. Works like Haiser's and like Arno Schickedanz's 1927 *Socialparasitism in the Life of the Nations* rendered such a *Lebensphilosophie* war ever more stark and apocalyptic. The world was poised between the forces of healthy Aryan light and those of Semitic darkness. The Nietzschean imperative to 'be oneself' was invoked as the crux of a fundamental clash: 'We stand,' wrote Schickedanz, 'at the point of world change. If the nature of Judaism is continuous destruction, ours is uplifting life. There is only one "holy" law of being, to be what we are!'[61]

If this kind of literature was circulated on the streets, plenty of respectable versions were to be found in the academy. Dependence on ethical conscience, wrote one scholar, is 'the stigma of those ... whom Nietzsche called "slave men" ... The anthropologist recognizes in the phenomenon of morality only one factor: the spiritual expression of inferior blood. ... But the principle of all sin against life is the so-called categoric imperative. The teacher of morality is unconsciously a systematic sinner against life.'[62]

Certain scholarly journals saluted Nietzsche as founder of a 'racial hygiene' that was particularly useful in the class struggle. As Egon Kirchner put it, Nietzsche's 'enmity against the proletariat' was a vital and healthy response, for 'the growth of the traditionless proleteriat leads to degeneration of the race.'[63] In 1920 Karl Bindung and Alfred Hoch published *The Release of Unworthy Life in Order That It Might Be Destroyed (Die Freigabe der Vernichtung Lebensunwertes Leben)*, a work applauded by one commentator as the 'creative solution' to problems posed by Plato, Thomas More and Nietzsche. It provided an answer to Nietzsche's observation that 'the sick person is a parasite of society.'[64]

61 A. Schickedanz, *Sozialparasitismus im Völkerleben*, Leipzig: Lotus-Verlag, 1927, p. 177.
62 R. Klages, *Briefe über Ethik* (1918), quoted in A. Bein, 'The Jewish Parasite' (above, note 53), p. 29.
63 E. Kirchner, 'Nietzsches Lehren im Lichte der Rassenhygiene,' *Archiv für Rassen und Gesellschaftsbiologie*, XVII (1926), p. 380. This long article is basically a paean of praise to Nietzsche but its approach differs from Nietzsche's emphasis on will in creating the *Übermensch*, arguing for a more strictly biological approach. It should be noted that this racist, eugenic journal was not antisemitic. When the Nazi's came to power, however, its editors were enthusiastic supporters.
64 E. Kirchner, 'Anfänge rassenhygienischen Denkens in Morus "Utopie" und Campanellas "Sonnenstadt,"' *Archive für Rassen und Gesellschaftsbiologie*, XXI (1927). See also R.N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, p. 179.

From that time on, through its Nazi implementation, the Nietzschean insistence on euthanasia was constantly invoked by its proponents, and later by its practitioners, as an essential ingredient in the creation of a healthy society.[65]

When the Nazis came to power, the building blocks of a Nietzsche-inspired vitalistic, immanent, re-naturalized, elemental society had been put in place, in many cases by sources that remained outside or even opposed to National Socialism (Spengler and Jünger are only the most outstanding examples). Having taken over the machinery of state, it remained for them only to keep reiterating these positive and negative messages — and to put them into practice.[66]

Specific historical circumstances created the Nietzsche of Weimar's radical right. After the Second World War — under different circumstances — the European radical right went into hibernation, and Nietzsche was again constructed anew in a number of different, more palatable guises: as Walter Kaufmann's enlightened philosopher of individual skepticism and creativity; as Michel Foucault's great genealogical demystifier of the discourse of power; as Gilles Deleuze's champion of multiple and pluralistic affirmation; as Jacques Derrida's playful, decentred prophet of deconstruction. In this post-modernist garb, Nietzsche's relevance and vitality have, if anything, increased. In Germany, for obvious reasons, there has been less lionization of Nietzsche than in America and France. There he has served predominantly as a warning against power-political irrationalism. It is surely not coincidental that Jürgen Habermas is the most determined and prominent opponent of the current French Nietzsche and, indeed, of post-modernism itself, regarding both as continuations of an ongoing and pernicious counter-Enlightenment enterprise.[67]

It now appears, however, that the tradition of the German radical-right Nietzsche and its potential for reactivation is not entirely exhausted. There *is* an intellectual New Right, and it has resurrected

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65 See, for instance, the discussion by Margarete Adam, 'Unwertiges Leben und seine Überwindung bei Nietzsche,' *Monistische Monatshefte*, XIV (1929), pp. 140-145. On practitioners see E. Klee, *'Euthanasie' im NS-Staat: Die 'Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens'*, Frankfurt a/M 1983, pp. 16 ff.

66 For a detailed discussion of the perplexed Nietzsche-Nazi relationship see my *Nietzsche Legacy* (above, note 5), Chaps. 8 and 9.

67 For a representative example of this position, and for his reflections on 'irrationalist post-modernists' such as Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault, see J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (English transl. by F. Lawrence), Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

a Nietzsche very similar to that discussed in this paper; only now, with the passage of time, Jünger and Heidegger have themselves been incorporated into the prophetic pantheon. This Nietzsche, appearing in such obscure magazines as *Wir selbst, Aufbruch, Criticon* and *Mut*, is propagated by men like Armin Mohler, Caspar von Schrenk-Notzing and Henning Eichberg and supported by certain wealthy foundations. As Peter Glotz perceptively notes, the new intellectual right has fortunately not thus far teamed up with its populist counterparts.[68] It is clearly a fringe phenomenon. Nevertheless, it would be as much a mistake to dismiss it totally as it would to exaggerate its importance. Its future depends upon how Europe will proceed from its present historic turn. The very existence of this trend does point to Nietzsche's remarkable staying power, and to his capacity for maintaining a myriad of salient faces under changing political circumstances.

Let me conclude with a few methodological caveats. I have tried here to outline the central role of the Nietzsche impulse within an emergent radical-right sensibility. Nietzsche clearly was not its only influence, nor did he 'create' that movement — specific historical circumstances did. The cultural historian need not assume that Nietzsche possessed an inherent political personality. Rather, he must insist on the dynamic nature of interpretation and reception, on the crucial role of shaping mediations. The Nietzschean *ouevre* encouraged such creative projective exercises almost by its nature. The complex and still ongoing history of Nietzscheanism demonstrates quite clearly that it has attracted large and divergent publics and fused with a variety of political postures, some of them decidedly 'progressive.'[69] The Nietzschean heritage has both moulded and been moulded by the dominant political and ideological perceptions of the day, precisely because it deals with ongoing core problems of Western secular civilization. It graphically illustrates Ernst Bertram's dictum — referring to Nietzsche — that 'great men are inevitably our creation, just as we are theirs.'[70]

If our interest lies in grasping the cultural dynamics, then, it makes little sense to talk of a 'true' or 'false' Nietzsche, of 'correct' interpretation or 'distorted' misinterpretation. Nevertheless, in the case we have studied here there surely was an echo, a certain affinity which

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68 See Glotz's fascinating article, on which the present analysis draws heavily: 'The New Right in the New Order,' *Liber*, 1 (1990), p. 20.
69 For a more complete discussion of this position see my 'Nazism, Normalcy and the German *Sonderweg*,' *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, IV (1988).
70 Bertram, *Nietzsche* (above, note 16), p. 5.

made the partnership plausible. Even if we maintain the terms of 'misinterpretation' or 'distortion,' the point made by Martin Jay[71] still holds: 'The potential for the specific distortions that do occur can be understood as latent in the text. Thus, while it may be questionable to saddle Marx with responsibility for the Gulag Archipelago or blame Nietzsche for Auschwitz, it is nonetheless true that their writings could be misread as justifications for these horrors in a way that, say, those of John Stuart Mill or Alexis de Toqueville could not.'

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71 M. Jay, 'Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate,' in idem, *Fin-de-Siècle Socialism*, New York 1988, p. 33.

Gilbert Merlio

The Critique of Liberal Democracy in the Works of Oswald Spengler

Spengler's critique of liberal democracy is set within a vast historical morphology which provides its basis, and which surely cannot be confined to the political dimension alone.[1] According to Spengler himself, however, the impulse for writing *The Decline of the West* came from a political event: the second Moroccan crisis and the events in Agadir in 1911.[2] It was then that he became aware of the crisis that was looming between the liberal camp, represented by England and France, and the conservative camp, with Germany at its head. He first considered grouping his reflections under the title 'Conservative and Liberal,' but was soon convinced that this decisive crisis for the future of the West could properly be understood only within the comprehensive framework of a universal history based on a comparative study of the great civilizations (*Hochkulturen*).

We know that the first volume of the *Decline* was written during World War I, as a sort of personal contribution to the 'ideas of 1914,' in the belief that victory would go to the conservative camp. With the publication of *Prussianism and Socialism* in 1919, Spengler became one of the spiritual fathers of what is widely called the 'conservative revolution.' The second volume of the *Decline*, published in 1922, was directed mainly against the Weimar Republic, and also against certain political writings of the time. Spengler kept wavering between ultra-right positions such as those embodied by the revolutionary nationalism of Ernst Jünger, for whom he was a mentor at the time,

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1 See O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (henceforth: *UA*), I–II, Munich 1963 (first edition 1918, 1922), p. 70: 'Das engere Thema ist also eine Analyse des Untergangs der westeuropäischen, heute über den ganzen Erdball verbreiteten Kultur. Das Ziel aber ist die Entwicklung einer Philosophie und der ihr eigentlichen, hier zu prüfenden Methode der vergleichenden Morphologie der Weltgeschichte.'
2 See idem, *Politische Schriften*, Munich 1932, p. VI; and see also idem, *Reden und Aufsätze*, Munich 1937, p. 73.

and a more traditional conservatism, close to that of the DNVP and big business circles, for which Spengler was to provide constant intellectual support.

The general lines of Spengler's comparative morphology of universal history are well known. The strength (but also the scientific weakness) of his theory, as well as the persuasiveness of its prognosis of doom, derived from its seamless integration of most of the symptoms of decadence identified by previous thinkers who had dealt with the subject. It incorporated the whole range of trends criticized by the conservative detractors of industrial society, namely, rationalism, materialism, and massification. In the same way, Spengler's comparative description of the evolution of the political and social forms characteristic of various cultural circles succumbed to almost all the clichés of antidemocratic thought under Weimar. Liberal democracy, explained Spengler, is decline in its political form. It always appears during the transition from 'culture' to 'civilization,' when the bourgeoisie, that urban order devoted to the dominance of mind and reason, seeks to replace the 'organic' state, which rests on the primitive orders of nobility, clergy and peasantry, with an 'abstract' state founded on the social contract — a state which, in theory, subordinates itself to intellectual, legal and moral norms (human rights).

Apart from the elements drawn from Burke and political romanticism (Görres's theory of states, for example), Spengler's critique is largely based on a vulgarized brand of Nietzscheanism and Social Darwinism. Its main objection to democracy is less that it is not rooted in tradition than that it is an attack on the essence of politics. Turning Clausewitz's formula on its head, Spengler claims that politics is merely an extension of war by other means. His writings abound with expressions combining aesthetics, physiology and sport. In the historical arena, the state's mission is to keep the nation 'in top form,'[3] which to Spengler meant having a strong 'constitution,' not so much

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3   See *UA*, pp. 965–966: 'In Form ist ein Feld von Rennpferden, das sicher in den Gelenken mit feinem Schwung über die Hürde geht und sich dann wieder im gleichen Takt der Hufe über die Ebene bewegt. In Form sind Ringer, Fechter und Ballspieler, denen das Gewagteste leicht und selbstverständlich von der Hand geht. In Form ist eine Kunstepoche, für welche die Tradition Natur ist wie der Kontrapunkt für Bach. In Form ist eine Armee, wie sie Napoleon bei Austerlitz und Moltke bei Sedan hatten. So gut wie alles, was in der Weltgeschichte geleistet worden ist, im Krieg und in jener Fortsetzung des Krieges durch geistige Mittel, die wir Politik nennen, alle erfolgreiche Diplomatie, Taktik, Strategie, sei es die von Staaten, Ständen oder Parteien, rührt von lebendigen Einheiten her, die sich in Form befanden.'

in the legal as in the physiological sense. The basic mistake of liberal ideologists, the representatives of 'political rationalism,' was to seek to construct the state from within, on the basis of individual rights and aspirations. In fact, in order to be able to respond to outside challenges, the state must be guided by two principles: power without, and authority within, the latter being a condition for the former.

We see how, in Spengler's work, the old theory of the 'power-state' (*Machtstaat*) takes on a new, vitalist significance. In his opinion, the best kind of state is one which relies on the charismatic power of its leader. Legitimacy and legality (to reiterate the Weberian categories) have value only in relation to this fundamental principle. Anything that might interfere with the direct bond of obedience between the leader and the group — in particular, humanitarian and universalist considerations, or liberal democracy's intermediary organs and its system of checks and balances — is considered harmful to the smooth running of the whole. That is why Spengler, unlike certain Weimar Republic neo-Romantics such as Othmar Spann, was by no means nostalgic either about the corporative state or about the Middle Ages. Feudal society, he believed, was merely a step towards the true concept of the state which came into being with absolute monarchy. Within the cycle of cultural development, this was the form of regime in which *politics* was most completely dominated by *the political*, whereas liberal democracy, in contrast, is the form of regime in which politics is furthest removed from the political.

The same type of conservatism, adapted somewhat in accordance with a vitalist theory postulating an opposition between Life and Mind, characterizes Spengler's critique of the democratic notions of liberty and equality. Both are interpreted as expressions of the mind's negative desire to emancipate itself from a natural or 'organic' order. Spengler is especially eager to take up Nietzsche's struggle against 'that modern idea par excellence,' that 'most lethal poison,' the 'biggest lie of all': equality. A healthy society rests on natural inequality; it is hierarchical. As if echoing the debate over the generation of the elites that pitted Hans Kelsen against Othmar Spann, Spengler, in agreement with the latter and with E.J. Jung,[4] held that the 'plebeian ideal' of equality favoured quantity over quality and the mediocrity of the masses over the gifts and skills of the elite. Democracy is a snare, a contradiction.

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4 One may in this context recall the significant title of E.J. Jung's 1928 work, *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigen*, which Jung saw as applying to democracy in general and more specifically to the Weimar Republic.

The people can never govern itself. The only right to which it can aspire is that of being well governed. The decline of the elites and the rise of the masses mark the decline of a civilization.[5]

A little like Carl Schmitt after him and Vilfredo Pareto before him, Spengler contrasted the principles of democracy with its reality. Where Pareto had spoken of 'derivation' and 'residue,' Spengler distinguished between the 'verbal' aspect of democracy — that is, its theoretical side — and its 'racial' aspect. Democratic ideas have influence only as instruments of a will to power. What democracy means, above all, is the triumph of certain men or groups who use its slogans in order to bolster their power. By thus recalling the essence of politics as he saw it, Spengler doubtless aimed to underline for his German readers the formalism of a regime that was foreign to them. His critique is not without similarities to that of Marx, inasmuch as he, too, differentiates between infrastructure (here: life, the will to power) and ideological superstructure. But Spengler goes notably further when, anticipating the *Dialectics of Reason*,[6] he describes the tendency of rationalism towards self-destruction and its perversion into an instrument of universal domination. Here he follows in the footsteps of thinkers such as Pareto, Mosca, Max Weber and Robert Michels, who, since the beginning of the twentieth century, had been reflecting upon the degree to which liberal, representative democracy was compatible with industrial mass society. To what extent could the latter resist the increasing bureaucracy and the oligarchic tendencies which appear within it? To what extent could it ensure the renewal of elites?

Spengler explained that democracy's dilution of authority, its theoretical delegation of a minute part to each citizen-elector, brings about a dictatorship of partisan oligarchies before finally giving way to the power of a Caesar. There is a dialectic of emancipation which leads straight to a form of despotism even more frightful than that which it claimed to terminate. Spengler summed up his socio-political argument as follows: 'Perfected culture is aristocratic; the civilization of the great

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5 The critique of massification as a cause and a symptom of decline is a key element in the conservative *Kulturkritik*, as developed notably by the German 'mandarins' studied by Fritz K. Ringer. This theme was soon to be central to the works of Ortega y Gasset (*La Rebelion de las masas*, 1930), Karl Jaspers (*Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, 1931), and, later, Hendrik de Man (*Vermassung und Kulturverfall*, 1951), to mention only a few works from a variety of philosophical and ideological contexts. For A. Toynbee, likewise, a culture dies the day its 'creative minority' loses its creative power.

6 See M. Horkheimer & T.W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1947.

cities of the world is initially democratic until the contradiction is resolved in Caesarism.'[7] In this he was simply repeating the old platonic belief that democracy is a breeding ground for tyranny. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville had likewise pointed to the danger inherent in democracy and its egalitarian imperatives. But what Tocqueville foresaw was the soft, covert totalitarianism of the modern state, the citizens' absolute guardian, providing for their well-being and security and thus encouraging their voluntary subservience. It was once again Nietzsche who first voiced the idea which Spengler erects as a historical law. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he spoke of a 'physiological' process set in motion by the 'democratic impetus': 'The new conditions which will bring about the coming of look-alike, mediocre men — gregarious, hard-working, all-purpose, skillful — are very likely to give birth to exceptional individuals of the most dangerous and seductive kind. .... What I mean is that the democratization of Europe is at the same time a breeding-ground for tyranny, in every sense of the word, including the spiritual sense.'[8]

The enslavement of public opinion to the press and the mass media is a particularly striking aspect of the 'dialectic of reason' perceived by Spengler in the process of emancipation that took place in the wake of the Enlightenment. Previously, he tells us, people dared not think freely; today they have the right to do so, but they no longer have the ability. By disseminating education, the thinkers of the Enlightenment laid the foundations of this new form of dependence. From the dream of emancipation, democracy evolved into harsh rule by the powers which dominate the press. There is something of a premonition of McLuhan in Spengler, who mischievously advises the sincere democrat to stop demanding freedom of the press, and instead ask for freedom *from* the press.[9] As Adorno, admiring the perspicacity of this thought, remarked, Spengler actually endows democracy with certain features that would

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7 *UA*, p. 1123.

8 Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Aphorism 242. One should perhaps mention that this transition from democracy to totalitarianism was also one of the major concerns of Jacob L. Talmon. The latter, however, saw the threat of totalitarianism as stemming essentially from the radicalization and absolutization of messianic political doctrines, be they universalistic or nationalistic. For Spengler, on the other hand, as we shall see again later in this paper, the rise of Caesarism comes as a result of the demise of ideologies, even if the second period of 'religiosity' may express itself in the guise of a personal worship of the Caesar. The fact remains that all these thinkers hold that the democratization of society, that is to say, its levelling and atomization, provides the breeding ground for the growth of totalitarianism or despotism.

9 *UA*, p. 1140, note.

only become fully manifest in totalitarian regimes.[10] Indeed, there are passages in the *Decline* that describe the manipulation of the masses in a manner which can only remind one of Goebbels. Nevertheless, one cannot help marvelling at his prophetic vision of a vast, worldwide communication network which threatens to turn every individual into 'a mere function of a vast anonymous thought.'[11]

The press bows mostly to the power of money. All democracy is plutocracy; or, as Spengler summed up his antidemocratic and anticapitalistic creed, 'the mind proposes, money disposes.'[12] The mind represents the chimerical ideals of liberal ideology. Money was of course decried by Spengler in the great tradition of conservative *Kulturkritik*, which deplored the increasing mercantilization of existence. By contributing to the destruction of the organic structures of the past, democratic ideals had paved the way for the reign of money as well as for a kind of vulgar hedonistic materialism on the part of the masses, ever bent on pleasure and consumption (*panem et circenses*).

But Spengler's anticapitalistic creed, like that of all the representatives of the conservative revolution, was of a right-wing brand which did not question the essential structures of capitalism (particularly private property), and it was based upon an ethical argument: namely, that mercantile society inverts the 'natural' hierarchy of politics and economics. Spengler never in any way sided with the mind, that is, with democracy and its ideals, which, as he scornfully pointed out, remain powerless when faced with the 'vital' realities of money. The latter had simply to be put back in the service of true 'politics,' that of the will to power and of imperialism. This point of view led Spengler, like most of the Weimarian neo-conservatives, to reject only the 'plundering' international capitalism of the world of finance (with a nod to Gottfried Feder), whereas the capitalism of enterprise was seen as 'creative,' and as a bulwark of national power.

Thus, we come to the paradox or inversion which lies at the very heart of the contradictory phenomenon of the 'conservative revolution,' or what Jeffrey Herf has called 'reactionary modernism.'[13] Spengler's thought brings this out with particular clarity. It is rooted

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10 T.W. Adorno, 'Spengler nach dem Untergang,' in *Prismen*, Frankfurt a/M 1976, pp. 51ff.

11 *UA*, p. 1137.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

13 J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, New York 1984, chapter entitled 'Oswald Spengler: Bourgeois Antinomies, Reactionary Reconciliations,' pp. 49–69.

in cultural pessimism: Spengler's feeling of nostalgia with regard to the great cultural forms of the past, which he often describes with such intimate understanding, is not to be doubted. Yet his doctrine results in the proclamation of a 'heroic realism'; inspired — while betraying its significance — by the Nietzschean *amor fati*, and advocating the resolute acceptance of modernity, despite its being the source of all evil. The whole of Spengler's practical philosophy can be summed up in the phrase: 'Culture is dead; long live civilization.' The biological determinism which marked Spengler's conception of those vast organisms, the *Hochkulturen*, left no other choice: as far as our Western or 'Faustian' cultural cycle was concerned, 'culture' was definitely finished.

But in many respects this absolute cultural pessimism was the reverse side of a nationalist optimism which may have been the true motive force of the entire system. For if Spengler set out in his historical morphology to prove the inescapability of the decline of the West, he sought to present this decline as the condition of the irresistible rise of Germany. Indeed, according to Spengler, the Germans had the task of building the empire, which, like the Roman Empire in ancient times, would constitute the final climax of our history. The paradigm of decadence with which Gibbon and Montesquieu, among others, had been concerned thus became the sign of an imperial mission. In a short work entitled *Pessimism?* published in 1921 as a commentary on his first volume,[14] Spengler argued that the great realistic tasks of 'civilization' could be quite enthralling, especially to the Germans. The last sentence was indicative: 'We Germans can no longer produce a Goethe, but we shall beget a Caesar.' 'Decline,' Spengler reiterated, 'is purely and simply synonymous with completion.' Thus, Spengler's cyclical, relativistic, pessimistic philosophy of history is shot through with a thread of linear rise, based on the nationalist myth of Faust. In Faustian terms, our Western civilization is the ultimate phase of a dynamic process — a phase which, owing to the enormous organizational, scientific and technical resources of 'civilization' (in theory, the decadent stage of 'culture'), incorporates that civilization's most outstanding forms of expression.

On the other hand, Spengler postulates a profound identity between Prussianism and 'socialism,' seen as the 'civilized,' that is to say, materialistic, form of Faustian ethics, the imperialist version of a

14 Spengler, *Reden und Aufsätze* (above, note 2), pp. 63–79.

moral imperative. Of course, this was not the humanitarian, egalitarian socialism of the Utopians and Marxists, but an 'organic' socialism whose main concern was national power and cohesion, and whose model was national organization in wartime. Oswald Spengler's Prussian socialism, with the civil servant as its central figure, was one of several versions of national socialism that were being propagated in the Weimar period, and which all arrived, on the eve of the actual advent of National Socialism, at the Jüngerian theses of 'total mobilization' and the total 'worker state.' This ideology advocated a condition of 'disciplinary solidarity'[15] that would transform the nation into a well-oiled war machine ready to launch its drive for hegemony, the only possible Internationale.

So what Spengler was proposing to the Germans was therefore neither a step backwards, nor the safeguarding of structures or values belonging to the past that may have survived the shipwreck of modernity. This type of conservative position was strictly 'romantic' in his eyes. What he was suggesting, as a man concerned with hard facts, was more like a leap forward into a kind of hypermodernity stripped of the emancipatory illusions of the Enlightenment. To his mind, this amounted to speeding up a change that was inevitable in the first place. Democracy was decline in its political form, and was itself in the process of declining; its values (such as human rights) and institutions inspired less and less belief. Like Carl Schmitt, Spengler thought that parliamentarianism was dead, that it was no longer anything but a façade for a 'Caesarism of organizations.'[16] Because of this, citizens were tending more and more to turn their backs on democratic ideals, institutions and procedures, especially elections. We sense the degree to which such statements reflected both the writer's own aspirations and the antidemocratic climate prevailing during the Weimar Republic. But we may also draw attention to the topicality of the themes broached by Spengler: the end of ideologies, 'democratic melancholia' (an expression recently coined by Pascal Bruckner[17]), and the revival of religion.

After two centuries of 'scientific' and rationalist 'orgy,'[18] the liberal era, according to Spengler, was drawing to a close, and was about

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15 The expression is borrowed from the French scholar of German studies, Edmond Vermeil, who discusses this issue in his book *Doctrinaires de la révolution allemande*, Paris 1937.
16 *UA*, p. 1123.
17 P. Bruckner, *La Mélancolie démocratique*, Paris 1990.
18 *UA*, p. 548.

to return to its sources. The time had come for a second period of 'religiosity,' which would also be an era of Caesarism. The latter resulted from the decay, brought on by democracy-plutocracy and the revolt of the masses, of all political and social structures. Caesarism reinstated the personal power of a charismatic leader over the anonymous mass of 'peasants' — fellaheen,' as Spengler called them. It therefore implied a return to the world of the primitive horde, but at the same time it had the great advantage, in Spengler's opinion, of permitting the voice of 'blood' to ring out anew in the hyper-intellectualized world of civilization, of restoring the pre-eminence of life over mind, and of the will to power over money. Thus, what was initially presented as a return to formlessness, to historical meaninglessness, took on the quality of purification and regeneration. A tradition had died, but Caesarism also signified the awakening of the 'plastic powers of the blood.'[19] It revived a primordial tradition which the reign of the mind and of money — that is, the liberal and democratic era — had temporarily eclipsed; it meant an end to humanitarian sham and the restoration of politics in its most cynical, and therefore purest, reality.

In Spengler's view, the future hegemony of Prussia-Germany was to be ensured by a combination of three factors: an authoritarian power symbolized by the figure of the Caesar; a mode of social organization permitting the integration and mobilization of the nation (in other words, 'Prussian socialism'); and a technocracy which, through its technical competence and modernity, would guarantee the effective running of the whole. Spengler's treatment of technology is characterized by the same kind of paradox or inversion that we encountered earlier in his discussion of civilization. In *Man and Technics* (1931), Spengler developed two contradictory images of technology. Initially, technical evolution is presented as the most visible expression of the increasing rationalization of the world and of life. Here the 'dialectic of reason' again played a part: although technology was originally a means of liberation from nature, it finally caused man to become a prisoner of the very artefacts with which he had surrounded himself. In our Faustian civilization, the most Promethean of all, organization finally does away with the organic.

Such considerations brought Spengler to write a few pages which would not be out of place in a manifesto calling for an 'alternative' lifestyle, but in no way did he argue for any kind of 'alternative'

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19 *Ibid.*, p. 1143.

solution. Because technology is a tremendous instrument of power, he claimed, it is a 'natural' extension of that uncommon beast of prey — man. From this Social-Darwinist, belligerent perspective, in which technology was somehow 'ontologized,' his critique is transformed into an accolade of technology and technocracy. Like money, technology was rejected when used for utilitarian, hedonistic ends, but endorsed when subordinated to the will to power. Thus, Spengler urged the West to stop 'selling out' its technological secrets to the 'coloured people' from former colonies who were beginning to challenge white hegemony.

It is now time to draw some conclusions in an attempt to define Spengler's place in antidemocratic thought, and in relation to the rise of Fascism and National Socialism. One finds in Spengler's thought the mixture of nostalgia for the past and modernism, the 'non-contemporaneity' (*Ungleichzeitigkeiten*) so insightfully discerned in National Socialist ideology and behaviour by Ernst Bloch.[20] But above all, and perhaps even more so than with other thinkers, Spengler's thought is a convincing illustration of Fritz Stern's contention that cultural despair may constitute a political danger.[21] Indeed, Spengler's presentation of 'culture' and 'civilization' as two successive and biologically irreversible phases highlights the illusive, rhetorical nature of this nostalgia for the past. The death of culture seems to be decreed for no other purpose than to make a better claim for the need for a 'heroic' transition to 'civilization.' Thomas Mann subtly described the complexity of this attitude:

> This thinker with his frozen heroism gives the impression of being able to accomplish this cruel task and deny his own self. The conservative, the man of culture that he is, seems to accept civilization reluctantly; but in fact, it is simply the appearance of an appearance, a double mystification because he really adheres to it, not only with his words and against himself but also with his whole being.[22]

If there is any grain of romanticism in Spengler, it is the romanticism of fact and force, which Julien Benda described so well in *The Great Betrayal*.[23] To this Spengler added a certain romanticism of sacrifice

20 E. Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935), Frankfurt a/M 1973.
21 F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, New York 1961.
22 T. Mann, 'Über die Lehre Spenglers,' in *Schriften und Reden über Literatur und Philosophie*, I, Frankfurt a/M 1968, p. 228.
23 J. Benda, *La Trahison des clercs*, 1927; *The Great Betrayal*, 1928.

and death, mingling it in a rather unsavoury manner with a vitalist exaltation, singing the praises of 'blood' and of the New Barbarian, the Caesar. This aesthetics of the 'twilight of the gods' finds an apt illustration in the figure of the 'sacrificed watchman' which comes at the end of *Man and Technics* as a symbol of 'realistic heroism.'

Fascist-style aesthetics can again be found, in Spengler, in his aesthetic conceptualization of modernism, which he inherited from the futurist exaltation of the beauty of the machine, as well as in his attraction to the imperial Roman style, which was seen as formally akin to the Prussian style. But there is a whiff of the Wilhelmenian bourgeoisie in his taste for the 'grand dimensions which ... so ennoble things.'[24] Compared with the aesthetic qualities of the Nietzschean Superman, whom Spengler considered a pure romantic fantasy,[25] Spengler's New Barbarian exhibited the prosaic features of those wing-collared industrialists, with their monocles and shaved heads, with whom Spengler, once famous, spent a great deal of his time and whom he did his best to resemble. There is a ring here of Herbert Marcuse's evaluation of the charismatic authoritarian leader of the modern era as being 'preformed' in the capitalist and liberal celebration of the great industrial leaders. Spengler called them the 'high-class realists' and acclaimed Cecil Rhodes as the emblematic figure of Faustian civilization — leading us to speculate whether there was not in fact a continuity leading from Rhodes to Mussolini and Hitler, and whether Marcuse's *'völkisch* heroic realism,'[26] before being characteristic of Fascism, was not simply the integrative ideology of capitalism in its monopolistic, imperialist stage.

Be that as it may, *The Decline of the West* can be read simultaneously as a classic of European pessimism, a pan-Germanic bible and a compendium of Fascist or protofascist ideologies. Spengler's thought is eminently nationalist, antihumanist and anti-universalist,[27] and even has a tendency to lapse into a kind of psychic racism in its advocacy

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24 Spengler's incorporation of several elements central to the ideology of the Second Reich, as described by R. Hamann and J. Hermand (*Epochen deutscher Kultur*, Berlin 1965), is striking: he evinces the same taste for the colossal, the same admiration for exceptional personalities, the same nostalgia for the elemental, the same disdain of the masses and ideal of distinction, the same activism and yearning for heroism.

25 *UA*, p. 466: 'Seine Kritik der Dekadenz ist unwiderleglich, seine Übermenschenlehre ist ein Luftgebilde.'

26 H. Marcuse, 'Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung,' *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, III (1934).

27 See P. Vaydat, 'L'Antihumanisme de Spengler: Une philosophie d'extrême droite,' in *Recherches germaniques*, Strasbourg 1980, pp. 140–155.

of the absolute segregation of societies and of the idea that they are utterly determined by their 'souls.' Moreover, 'Prussian socialism,' like all other forms of national or organic socialism, involves an antirationalist, antimaterialist revisionism of Marxism,[28] eliminating the class struggle and proletarian internationalism, and proclaiming the goal of the national community not as a collective quest for happiness but as a heroic realization of its imperial vocation. The base materialism of liberal society is contrasted with the 'great realism' of conquering men and peoples. Thus, in theory, Spengler offered a third path, an alternative to the two contending heirs to Judeo-Christian messianism, liberalism and Marxism, which shared the common denominator of mass hedonism, the obverse side of the individualist hedonism in whose name the liberal ideology developed.

What is also, and above all, striking in Spengler is the radicalism of his thought, which appears to make him the opposite of a conservative or reactionary, and which is expressed particularly in his striving after a sort of biological utopia that brings together the most extreme form of instrumental modernity and the elementary forces of the 'blood.' Even more than aestheticism, it is cynicism that triumphs in Spengler's work. Not only does he declare the rationalistic intellectual and moral norms of the Enlightenment to be null and void, but he does not even believe, like that other key thinker of the conservative revolution, Moeller van den Bruck, in the possibility of creating other values which might be worth saving. Where Nietzsche saw a possibility for transcending nihilism, Spengler teaches imperialism[29] — a kind of self-justifying imperialism that will enable the West, under the guidance of Prussia-Germany, to survive for a few more centuries before yielding to the combined onslaught of an internal and external proletariat (an idea later taken up by Toynbee).[30]

Alfred von Martin wrote: 'Spengler is capable of something Nietzsche was not yet able to achieve: to opt for barbarism without seeing it as a fountain of youth.'[31] Because of this absolute realism, which

28 I refer here to the works of Zeev Sternhell, who rightly sees in this revision of Marxism one of the basic elements of Fascist ideology.

29 *UA*, p. 51.

30 Here Spengler uses the expressions 'white world revolution' to refer to the 'Bolshevik' revolutions of internal proletariats, and 'coloured peoples' world revolution' to refer to the challenging of white hegemony by the rest of the world. These ideas are developed in two works written by Spengler at the beginning of the 1930s, expressing his reactions to the world economic crisis and the advent of National Socialism: *Der Mensch und die Technik*, Munich 1931, and *Jahre der Entscheidung*, Munich 1933.

31 A. von Martin, *Wegbereiter des deutschen Zusammenbruchs*, Recklinghausen 1948, p. 41.

dispenses with any kind of justifying or optimistic ideology, Spengler can perhaps be placed even beyond Fascism. This extreme position, together with certain conservative reflexes, explains his rejection of National Socialism. In *The Hour of Decision* (1933), he criticized its millennarianism, its demagogy, its biological racism, which, in its aim to make aristocrats of all Germans, clearly revealed its plebeian origins. National Socialism brought with it a dominance of the mob which showed it to be a 'first cousin' to Bolshevism. Like the latter, it was one of the ultimate forms of the democratic impetus — not a cure for decadence, but one of its symptoms. As Ernst Bloch so charmingly put it, Spengler did not find Hitler's jowls sufficiently aristocratic.[32] He saw more of the true style of the Caesar in Mussolini and Fascism.

Like most prophets, Spengler was unwilling to acknowledge the full implications of his forecast. The spiritual aristocrat within him recoiled when confronted with Nazi barbarism. But even though the perspicacity of some of his views is still capable of attracting our attention (as attested in several articles by Adorno and Jacques Bouveresse[33]), the thinking of this 'renegade cleric,' this 'defeatist of humanity,' as Thomas Mann called him, must be seen as auguring a shift in German nationalist ideology — whose imperialist aims it honestly admits — towards the National Socialism on whose threshold Spengler halted.[34]

32 E. Bloch, 'Spenglers Raubtiere und relative Kulturgärten,' in idem, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (above, note 20).
33 J. Bouveresse, 'La Vengeance de Spengler,' in *Le Temps de la réflexion*, Paris 1983, pp. 371–401.
34 See my articles, 'Spengler et le national-socialisme: Le dilemme d'un conservateur,' in *Recherches germaniques*, Strasbourg 1976, pp. 112–135; and 'Spengler ou le dernier des Kulturkritiker,' in *Revue d'Allemagne*, XIV (1982), pp. 97–112; and, more generally, my thesis: *Oswald Spengler, Témoin de son Temps*, I–II, Stuttgart 1982.

Jerry Z. Muller

The Radical Conservative Critique of Liberal Democracy in Weimar Germany: Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt

During the Weimar Republic, Germany was a liberal, democratic, capitalist, welfare state. To be sure, each of these adjectives applied only in some imperfect sense — but that can be said of most regimes to which they are applied. As with many comparable states in Europe between the wars and elsewhere in the postwar decades, the tensions between these various characteristics of the Weimar Republic helped bring about its demise.

This essay explores the shared critique of such regimes developed between 1918 and 1933 by Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer, two of the most intellectually accomplished German representatives of what might be called 'radical conservatism.' Their intellectual and rhetorical gifts helped undermine support for liberal democracy in Germany, and indeed were intended to do so; this paper, however, focusses on their social and political thought rather than on their influence. To be sure, a joint presentation risks slighting the internal development of each thinker and understating the divergences between the two. The advantage of a dual focus, however, is to provide a stereoscopic view of radical conservatism, bringing into relief the common themes and concerns sometimes flattened by the peculiar vocabulary or formal presentation of either Schmitt or Freyer. In the case of Schmitt, much recent scholarship in English has overlooked or even denied the radical conservatism of his Weimar writings. The approach pursued here, will, I hope, put his works into more accurate historical perspective.

Radical Conservatism

Radical conservatism unites several predilections which, in combination, make it a recognizably distinct and recurrent phenomenon. The radical conservative shares many of the concerns of more conventional

conservatism, such as its demand for institutional authority and continuity with the past, but he believes that the processes characteristic of modernity have destroyed the valuable legacy of the past, and a restoration of bygone virtues therefore demands radical or revolutionary action. Thus, one radical conservative described himself as 'too conservative not to be radical,' while another declared that to be 'conservative means creating things that are worth preserving.'[1] Radical conservatism shares the conservative emphasis on the role of institutions, but seeks to create new institutions which will exert a far stronger hold on the individual than the existing ones, perceived as 'decayed' because of their relative tolerance.

Like other political radicals, radical conservatives look to state power to achieve their goals. They typically seek the reassertion of collective particularity — of the nation, the *Volk* or race, or the community of the faithful — against a twofold threat. Both internally and from without, as a result of the influence of powerful foreign states, the collectivity and the individuals who comprise it are menaced by corrosive ideas and institutions identified as alien and incapable of providing them with worthy goals. These unhealthy elements may include, on the one hand, the market as arbiter of expressed preferences, parliamentary democracy, and the pluralism of value systems which capitalism and liberal democracy are thought to promote; on the other hand, they may also include the ideas and institutions of internationalist socialism.

Yet for all their antipathy to such 'modern' phenomena, radical conservatives typically advocate technological modernization, in part because a successful challenge to foreign powers demands a mastery of technology. Defending the body politic against the cultural and political effects of modernity would seem, in their view, to require a homeopathic absorption of the organizational and technological hallmarks of modernity.[2] Radical conservatism is thus phenomenologically distinct from both traditionalist conservatism and reaction.

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1 The self-description is taken from P. de Lagarde, *Deutsche Schriften*, p. 5, quoted in R. Hermann, *Kulturkritik und konservative Revolution*, Tübingen 1971, p. 241. The declaration comes from A. Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*[3], Hamburg 1931, quoted in M. Greiffenhagen, *Das Dilemma des Konservatismus in Deutschland*[2], Munich 1977, p. 243.

2 On the affirmation of technology by radical conservatives see J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, New York–Cambridge 1984, especially Chaps. 1 and 9. I have explored the topic of the conceptual barriers to the recognition of National Socialism as 'radically conservative' and its implications for historical research and interpretation in 'Enttäuschung und Zweideutigkeit: Zur Geschichte rechter Sozialwissenschaftler im Dritten Reich,' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, no. 3 (1986), pp. 289–316.

Freyer and Schmitt: Formative Experiences

Despite significant differences in origin, style, and temperament, Freyer and Schmitt shared a number of formative experiences which help to account for their development into radical conservative intellectuals.[3] Both were born into pious households, Freyer into a Protestant family in Saxony in 1887, Schmitt into a Catholic family in Westphalia one year later. Both were expected by their families to pursue clerical careers, but neither did. During and after their years of university study, each belonged to cultural circles that were deeply critical of contemporary bourgeois society: Freyer joined the *Jugendbewegung*, while Schmitt was associated with expressionist circles in Munich. Both thus became members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, deeply alienated from the bourgeois culture of the German Reich.

For both men, the Great War was another formative experience. Freyer spent most of the war as an officer on the Western Front, while Schmitt served as a legal counsellor to the German army. The war provided both with models for civilian society: Freyer spoke of the 'community of the trenches,' while Schmitt used the example of wartime military control to demonstrate the viability of dictatorship in modern society. These wartime experiences took on added significance in view of the subsequent revolution and civil strife in Leipzig and Munich, where Freyer and Schmitt respectively found themselves at the war's end. For Schmitt, who had been appointed to a government post in Strassburg, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine was especially painful. Shortly thereafter, as a professor in Bonn in 1923, Schmitt experienced at first hand the French occupation of the Rhineland. These last two events made the issue of national sovereignty and power central to his concerns.

During the 1920s, both Freyer and Schmitt supplemented their narrowly academic publications with works that combined historical, philosophical, and political reflection and were intended for a larger, non-academic audience. Freyer made his name as a professor of philosophy in Kiel, and after 1925 as a professor of sociology in Leipzig. Schmitt became a professor of law, first in Bonn and after 1928 in Berlin. The two met in the late 1920s and became friends, their

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3 For biographical information on Freyer see J.Z. Muller, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, Princeton 1987, Chaps. 1–3; on Schmitt see the works by Bendersky, Kennedy, and Tommissen cited in the Bibliographical Note.

personal rapport following from and contributing to their intellectual and ideological affinities.

Freyer and Schmitt were both part of the network of the radical right in Weimar, and Schmitt became involved with the coterie around General Schleicher. However, their friends and influence extended well beyond these circles. Neither was a National Socialist before 1933, but after Hitler's assumption of power they cooperated closely with the Nazi regime and saw themselves and their students appointed to important positions in the universities and the governmental bureaucracy. Eventually, both men were disappointed and disillusioned with the regime they had supported. Both were long-lived: Hans Freyer died in 1969 and Carl Schmitt in 1985, and they remained intellectually active and productive after the fall of the Third Reich. Freyer's *Theorie des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1955) was a widely read and influential work of social thought in Germany of the 1950s, after which his intellectual influence declined markedly. Schmitt's influence has waxed and waned, both in Germany and abroad. In recent decades his work has been most influential in Spain and Italy; there has also been some interest in his writings in France and Japan, and in recent years several of them have been translated into English as well.[4] There is thus a large and growing secondary literature on Schmitt, which varies greatly in quality and accuracy.

Attempting to form a clear picture of Schmitt's ideas and his place in history presents some unusual obstacles. First, Schmitt's own accounts of his past are tendentious and unreliable. In the four decades after the fall of the Third Reich, he devoted a good deal of his time and energy to rewriting his past, as he tried to convince first Allied investigators and then journalists and historians that he had been intellectually and politically distant from National Socialism before and after 1933. Second, there is the problem of continuity and change in Schmitt's work. In fact, while there are continuities (often seamless) between his pre-1933 works and those written between 1933 and 1945, there are important differences as well, not least the appearance of an open and virulent antisemitism in those from the latter period.

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4   For more on Freyer's influence see Muller, *Other God* (above, note 3), passim.
    On Schmitt's influence within and beyond Germany see Maschke, *Der Tod des Carl Schmitt*, and the essays in Quaritsch, *Complexio Oppositorum* (see below, Bibliographical Note). On Schmitt's influence in Italy from the 1930s through the 1980s see W. Schieder, 'Carl Schmitt und Italien,' *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (January 1989), pp. 1–22. On the appropriation of Schmitt by the French *Nouvelle Droit* see also M. Baldus, 'Carl Schmitt im Hexagon,' *Der Staat* XXVI (1987), pp. 566–686.

In the 1950s and 1960s there was a tendency for West German commentators on Schmitt to read his earlier work in light of his post-1933 writings and actions, producing a somewhat distorted version of Schmitt's thought during the Weimar period.[5] Much recent literature, in contrast, tends to err in the opposite direction, accepting Schmitt's claim that he was a defender of Weimar democracy (which, as we will see, is true only in a Pickwickian sense). Moreover, Carl Schmitt was a powerful rhetorician. His works abound in strikingly suggestive key terms and definitions that turn out, upon closer inspection, to be ambiguous, such as his representation of democracy as the identification of ruler and ruled, or of politics as characterized by the distinction between friend and enemy. Schmitt himself sometimes used his key terms in opposite senses over time.[6] For all these reasons, it is especially important to set Schmitt's conceptual claims in their political and cultural context in order to understand their meaning and import.

Freyer's Critique of Liberalism

Both Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt tended to equate liberalism with enlightenment, rationalism and universalism. A key premise of their critique of liberal democracy was that ultimate meaning in collective life was possible only on the basis of collective particularity and collective delimitation. These basic principles and their contemporary political implications were spelled out in a series of books which Freyer wrote in the early 1920s: *Die Bewertung der Wirtschaft im philosophischen Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1921), *Prometheus: Ideen zur Philosophie der Kultur* (1923), *Theorie des objektiven Geistes: Eine Einleitung in der Kulturphilosophie* (1923), and, lastly, *Der Staat* (1925), which drew out the implications of his philosophy of culture and his critique of contemporary society for political philosophy and action.

Die Bewertung der Wirtschaft im philosophischen Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts was an effort to flesh out the notion of a 'spirit of the nineteenth century' and suggest by contrast the spirit of the twentieth.[7]

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5   This is the case in the otherwise valuable works of K. Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich 1962), and C. Graf von Krockow, *Die Entscheidung — Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart 1958).

6   As Freyer pointed out in an admiring review of Schmitt's collection of essays, *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar-Genf-Versailles*, reviewed in *Deutsche Rechtswissenschaft*, 5 (1940), pp. 261–266, especially pp. 261–263.

7   See Muller, *Other God* (above, note 3), pp. 78–87.

In fact, so broad was the range of nineteenth-century philosophical attitudes regarding the relationship of the economy to the rest of culture that no common spirit could be distilled inductively. What Freyer actually did was to assume that a particular social philosophy — roughly equivalent to Manchesterian liberalism — was the real spirit of the nineteenth century. Freyer portrayed economic liberalism and classical political economics as a system of thought which had resulted in the reification of the economy. He saw the spirit of the nineteenth century in the subordination of all realms of existence to the demands of the market economy, and in the extension of the modes of thought characteristic of the market to the realm of ethics.

Freyer's views on the nature of culture, politics and the contemporary human predicament were based upon a core conception of the nature of man, what Germans have come to call a 'philosophical anthropology.' Freyer often expressed this core conception of his social thought in metaphorical terms. The controlling metaphors were of boundedness and unboundedness, or openness and closedness. Freyer used these metaphors to express his central concern, which had to do with possibility and limitation. For Freyer, it was unbounded possibility that most threatened contemporary man. His political philosophy stressed the need for boundaries, and his political program was a quest for collective delimitation. Freyer's social theory emphasized the problem of social integration. Behind it lay his conviction that only through membership in stable, well-integrated social groups was the individual freed of the sense of limitlessness intrinsic to subjective life.

The source of boundaries for the labile self, and hence of meaning, was culture, a term which Freyer used in the broadest sense to indicate all the externalized creations of humanity — that is, its institutions and beliefs.[8] The individual could escape the limitless flux of subjective life only by internalizing the delimiting culture. The solution to the problem of individual identity thus lay in the ability of social groups to convey to the individual a sense of delimiting purpose, and this in turn depended upon the stability of the social groups of which the individual was a part. Freyer's theory of social groups was voluntaristic

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8 H. Freyer, *Theorie des objektiven Geistes — Eine Einleitung in die Kulturphilosophie* (1923), p. 55. Here Freyer follows Hegel's use of the term in the *Phenomenology*, where it signifies not only 'high culture,' but culture in the anthropological sense of the sum total of a society's institutions and beliefs. On Hegel's usage see J. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976, p. 144.

or idealistic:[9] groups of human beings existed primarily by virtue of their sharing some common purpose, some collective end or goal. They ultimately cohered through the voluntary subordination of the individual to a collective purpose, and their degree of cohesion reflected the intensity of the members' commitment to such supra-individual ends.[10] The social groups upon which the individual depended for a sense of stability and delimitation were thus themselves dependent upon the affirmation of some higher purpose.

Assuming, as Freyer did, that society required some ultimate purpose or collective aim, from whence was it to come? Could a society agree on some ultimate purpose, and on a system of institutions and symbols through which to embody it? Could it be freely and rationally chosen, based on universal, rational standards? Could humanity create a rational and universal culture *de novo*? This was the political project which Freyer identified with the Enlightenment and its liberal and socialist successors. His own response to these questions was negative, his scepticism born of the central premise of his radical conservative social theory — namely, the interrelation of meaning, tradition and particularity.

Freyer's theory of tradition is an outgrowth of his overriding concern for stability in the face of the natural transitions of life. The role of culture was to provide stability amid flux. But were culture to change as quickly as life itself, it would fail to realize the stabilizing function which it occupied in Freyer's social thought. Life lived only in awareness of the present, within a system of institutions, values and symbols which reflected only the needs of contemporary life, had no stability or continuity. How, then, did cultural forms acquire some degree of 'depth' or permanence amid the changing needs of human beings over historical time? Freyer's answer, briefly stated, was that cultural forms acquire greater emotional resonance for the present by virtue of their multiple past associations and connotations. Through tradition — the reappropriation of past culture — contemporary life acquires some historical 'weight,' some continuity with the past which gives 'depth' to the culture of the present and enhances social stability.[11]

Freyer's two-pronged critique of enlightened, rationalist universalism was based, on the one hand, on his understanding of the role of

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9 The terms 'voluntaristic' and 'idealistic' are drawn from T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, I–II, New York 1968, passim, especially pp. 81–82.
10 Freyer, *Theorie* (above, note 8), pp. 52–54.
11 *Ibid.*, pp. 94–98.

tradition or grounding in the past as the source of cultural 'weight,' and on the other on his conception of the relationship between meaning and particularity. Since personal meaning was linked to collective stability, collective integration to collective purpose and collective purpose to the renewal of tradition, the question of which tradition ought to form the basis of collective purpose inevitably arose. Were such a choice truly arbitrary — were there no overriding criteria for choosing one cultural tradition over another — the result would be indecision and inaction, accompanied by the very sense of meaninglessness which Freyer's entire program was intended to obviate. In such a case, he wrote, 'The melancholy of multiple possibilities lies upon us and paralyzes our action.'[12]

In contradistinction to philosophies which asserted the existence of some universal set of norms appropriate to all people on the basis of their common humanity and accessible to all through reason, Freyer maintained that meaning exists in history only in multiplicity.[13] 'History,' he wrote, 'thinks in plurals, and its teaching is that there is more than one solution for the human equation.'[14] The 'plurals' comprised the various distinct historical cultures, each of which was created and transmitted by a historical collectivity or *Volk*. As Freyer often noted, this assumption was a legacy of the German historicist tradition. In his hands, it became the basis of a normative social theory and a prescriptive plan of political action, centred on the concept of the *Volk*.

During his radical conservative phase, Freyer viewed the affirmation of collective historical particularity in the form of the *Volk* as the only alternative to the unbounded society and ephemeral culture of rationalist universalism. The characteristic processes of modernity dissolved all connection with that particular culture of the past which could add depth to the culture of the present, leaving no bounded collectivity to which the individual could subordinate himself.

For Freyer, an open society was a meaningless society. It might leave its members free to pursue their individual interests and vocations, but without some larger collective goal, the pursuit of individual choices would be arbitrary. Only a society devoted to the affirmation of its particularity could provide the individual with a sense of purpose and meaning. It was this perspective which lay at the heart of Freyer's

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12 H. Freyer, *Prometheus — Ideen zur Philosophie der Kultur*, Jena 1923, p. 70.
13 Idem, *Der Staat*, Leipzig 1925, p. 194.
14 Freyer, *Prometheus* (above, note 12), p. 78.

critique of contemporary Germany in the 1920s. In *Prometheus*, Freyer expressed his loathing of 'chaotic ages without any limits.'[15] 'We have a bad conscience in regard to our age,' he wrote. 'We feel ourselves invalidated, lacking in meaning, unfulfilled, not even obligated.'[16] His philosophy of history was primarily concerned with explaining how modern society had become so open — his political philosophy with how it could be closed again.

Modern society, according to Freyer, was characterized by what his teacher Georg Simmel had called 'the tragedy of culture.' Each realm of culture — art, science, scholarship, the economy, technology — takes on a life of its own, and as each realm develops independently, according to its own logic, it loses its connection to a specific human group and a specific historical culture and takes on a universalistic impetus.[17] The culture no longer fits together as a meaningful totality, and it ceases to provide a closed world of shared horizons for its members.

It was the relationship between capitalism and technology that most vexed Hans Freyer. The intrinsic logic of these fields was transnational, leading to the dissolution of political and cultural barriers.[18] The unguided spread of technology would lead to a global system with no historical or organic connections to particular collective cultures. All of humanity would eventually be absorbed into 'a rationalized order of objective relations, an economic trading company.'[19] This image of a world order based upon peaceful trade between nations pursuing their collective welfare was close to the future visions of nineteenth-century liberals such as Herbert Spencer. To Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt, however, this prospect was no dream but a nightmare. Given Freyer's premise that meaning arises only from cultural particularity, it was tantamount to universal meaninglessness.

Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism

Similar themes — of the loss of cultural coherence, the threat of subjectivism and the equation of the nineteenth century with liberalism, perceived as the economization of existence — run through Carl Schmitt's works written from 1916 through 1929. The theme of the modern age as the age of economization and mechanization goes back

15 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
17 Freyer, *Der Staat* (above, note 13), pp. 66–72.
18 *Ibid.*, pp. 174–175.
19 Freyer, *Prometheus* (above, note 12) pp. 55–56.

in Schmitt's work at least as far as his 1916 book, *Theodor Däublers 'Nordlicht'*.[20] In his book on *Political Romanticism*, published in 1919, he argued that romanticism ought to be defined not by the varied institutions to which romantics were committed, but by the nature of their commitment. Romanticism was characterized by its ultimate subjectivism, which made lasting, binding commitments to any authoritative idea or institution impossible. For the romantic, any given institution was merely the occasion for his own subjective, aesthetic experience.[21] This attitude, according to Schmitt, was subversive of all normative institutions.[22]

Schmitt saw a close historical and sociological link between the subjectivist aestheticism characteristic of romanticism and the rise of the bourgeoisie and of liberalism. According to his historical analysis, the Roman Catholic church had once provided what Schmitt called 'form,' a clear sense of ultimate authority and legitimacy.[23] With the decline of the theological basis of shared authority after the wars of religion, the only viable source of ultimate and integrative authority in continental Europe was the newly created institution of the modern absolutist state.[24] In the course of the nineteenth century, the new bourgeoisie with its philosophy of liberalism had challenged the claims

20 See the analysis of that work in Kennedy, 'Politische Expressionismus' (below, Bibliographical Note), especially p. 243.
21 C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*[2], Berlin 1925, p. 132.
22 *Ibid.*, pp. 22.
23 See C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, Hellerau 1923.
24 In his work of the late 1930s, Schmitt maintained that a key distinction in modern European history was between the continental great powers of France and Prussia, which were forced to develop the model of an absolutist state based on a land army and a professional bureaucracy, and England, which had opted against this model and instead championed the navy, the sea, and trade. This historical dichotomy, which identified Prussia with the absolutist, military model and England with its paradigmatic antithesis, appears to have been adapted by Schmitt from Otto Hintze, whose own dichotomy was adapted from Herbert Spencer's distinction between the military and the industrial models of society, but placed greater emphasis on divergent developments in political representation. Thus, for Schmitt, the struggle between Germany and England was a struggle for the preservation of 'the political,' the state, and a defined national culture, against the disintegrative forces of liberalism, trade, and the Jews. For Schmitt's dichotomies see his *Leviathan* (1938), especially pp. 119–127; 'Staat als konkreter, an eine geschichtliche Epoche gebundener Begriff' (1941; reprinted in his *Verfassungsrechtliche Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1924-1954*, Berlin 1958, pp. 375–385), and *Land und Meer — Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung* (1942; reprinted Cologne 1981), pp. 86–102. For the expression of related sentiments in Schmitt's personal conversations in that period, see the memoir by N. Sombart, 'Spaziergänge mit Carl Schmitt,' in his *Jugend in Berlin, 1933–1943*, Munich 1984, pp. 260–265. On Hintze's dichotomy and its relationship to Spencer see O. Hintze, 'Military Organization and the Organization of the State,' in F. Gilbert (ed.), *The*

of the absolutist state to ultimate authority and sovereignty, only to have its own authority challenged by new social forces and demands for mass democracy. Thus, older structures of political and cultural authority had been dissolved, but no new authoritative 'forms' had taken their place.[25]

While romanticism had begun as an antibourgeois movement, the bourgeoisie itself had adopted the subjective aestheticism of romanticism.[26] Romanticism was thus the cultural correlate of what Schmitt called the 'individualistic, disintegrated society' of a 'bourgeois world which isolates the individual in the cultural realm, making the individual his own source of reference.'[27] 'When the hierarchy of spiritual spheres dissolves, anything can become the centre of cultural life,' wrote Schmitt, and this was tantamount to having no centre. As a result, contemporary spiritual existence was privatized, uncertain and suspicious of all authority.[28] Schmitt summarized the link between romantic subjectivism and the spread of capitalistic relations as follows: 'The path ... towards economization goes through the aesthetic, and the path through sublime aesthetic consumption and satisfaction is the most certain and pleasant path to a general economization of cultural life and to a spiritual constitution which finds the central categories of human existence in production and consumption.'[29]

Behind Schmitt's more concrete political analysis of Weimar politics, then, lay his premise that the domination of modern life by economic considerations was culturally degrading, leading to a trivialization of existence. An implicit aim of *Political Romanticism* was to restore the plausibility of non-liberal sources of authority, by severing the link between romanticism, on the one hand, and the particular commitments of the romantics to the Catholic Church, the state, and the historically evolved *Volk*, on the other.[30]

Historical Essays of Otto Hintze, New York 1975, pp. 178–215; and also E.C. Page, 'The Political Origins of Self-Government and Bureaucracy: Otto Hintze's Conceptual Map of Europe,' *Political Studies*, XXXVIII (1990), pp. 39–55.

25 Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (above, note 21), p. 18.

26 C. Schmitt, 'Das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen und Entpolitisierungen' (1929), reprinted in Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe* (above, note 6), pp. 122–124.

27 Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (above, note 21), pp. 26–27.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 21.

29 Schmitt, 'Zeitalter' (above, note 26), p. 123.

30 See especially *Politische Romantik* (above, note 21), pp. 88-101, where Schmitt distinguishes between the political philosophy of such counter-revolutionary conservatives as Burke, Bonald, and Haller, and the ephemeral commitment of the romantics to these institutions.

A central contention in both Schmitt's and Freyer's work was that the contemporary loss of unified cultural and political authority had its roots in the dominant process of the nineteenth century, which Schmitt called 'economization' and Freyer called the rise of bourgeois society. Their philosophy of history and their contemporary political program were based upon a shared belief that this process had brought about, in Schmitt's terms, 'the decline of form,' or, in Freyer's (following Saint-Simon), a 'negative' or 'inorganic' epoch.

Positive Alternatives: The Political Assertion of Collective Purpose and Particularity

For both Freyer and Schmitt, then, the nineteenth century was as much a spiritual as a chronological designation, identified with the economization of society, the subjectivization of authority, and the dissolution of a shared culture and shared ultimate purpose. To correct these negative trends, both posed a re-creation of collective purpose which would lift people out of their private concerns. That purpose was to be the reassertion of the power of the German *Volk* and the creation of a state powerful enough to make Germany a player on the stage of world history.

The prospect of a dawning age devoid of meaning was not, in Freyer's view, an inexorable consequence of the development of technology. Technology might lack intrinsic meaning and purpose, but if modern society was threatened by a general purposelessness and absence of 'totality,' this was because of the domination not of technology but of capitalism. The development of technology in modern Europe had until now gone hand in hand with that of capitalism, a system based upon the maximization of individual profit. It was capitalism, not technology, that was responsible for the loss of common goals, and the political task facing his contemporaries, Freyer believed, was to dissolve the connection between the two. Technology must be reintegrated into the 'totality of life of the European nations.'[31] In a similar vein, Schmitt wrote that technology was not politically neutral: it was an instrument and a weapon, and the question to be faced was that of its political use.[32]

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31 H. Freyer, 'Zur Philosophie der Technik,' *Blätter für die deutsche Philosophie (1929–1930)*, pp. 200–201. On the attitudes of thinkers of the Weimar right towards technology, see Herf, *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 2).

32 Schmitt, 'Zeitalter' (above, note 26), pp. 128–131.

Writing in 1925, Freyer maintained that Europe now stood at the threshold of a new historical era that would maintain the cultural and especially the technological achievements of the nineteenth century, but would integrate them into a closed totality based upon the reassertion of collective particularity, in a manner which recaptured the community of shared purpose. The reassertion of the transcendent value of one's particular *Volk* was to be the essence of the faith which would reintegrate society, and the preservation of the *Volk* was to serve as the transcendent goal to which all aspects of culture, economy and technology were to be subordinated. The agency that would guarantee and control this subordination was the state. Freyer had a name for the structure that the *Volk* and the state would create: the *Reich*. The *Reich* represented a condition in which the alienation and fragmentation of the present had been overcome. The diversity of pursuits characteristic of the present would continue, but each occupation would now be harnessed by the state to the purposes of the *Reich*. Thus each occupation would now become a calling, its practitioner aware that his development of technical means served the ultimate end of the preservation of the *Reich*.[33]

In keeping with his neo-Hegelian perspective, Freyer described the state as the ultimate objectification of *Geist*, its most concrete institutional expression. As with the economy and technology, so too were all the other realms of human endeavour to be guided by the state in the interests of the *Volk*. The role of the state, Freyer wrote, was to politicize every element of culture. He scoffed at the liberal, 'negative' view of freedom which sought to protect 'so-called individual freedom' from the 'so-called coercion of the law.' True freedom, he wrote, is positive freedom, 'freedom not from the state, but through the state; not in contrast to law, but in the law itself.' Freedom in this sense meant the freedom to participate in the self-realization of the *Volksgeist*, the freedom to subordinate oneself to the goal of collective self-assertion.[34]

What did Freyer mean by the *Volk*? He used the term in both a historicist-romantic and in a Machiavellian or civic republican sense. Though he drew on Hegel, Dilthey and Spengler in an attempt to reformulate the concept of *Volksgeist* in a systematic, scientific manner, even this most systematic of his expositions remains little more than suggestive. Each historical culture, he wrote, is the expression of a basic group attitude 'which is wholly pre-rational, unformulated, and

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33 Freyer, *Der Staat* (above, note 13), p. 126.
34 *Ibid.*, pp. 165–167.

unconscious.' The entire culture of each group (which he equated with the *Volk*) is the realization or development of this particular 'primordial attitude toward the world.'[35] Each culture therefore places a different accent on the characteristic features of human life.[36] Freyer provided few specific examples of the manner in which such collective particularities were expressed in culture. He regarded language as the most important expression of the *Volksgeist* and the major constitutive element of the *Volk*.

For a non-scientific audience drawn from the *Jugendbewegung* and the intellectual right, Freyer wrote of the organic origins of the *Volk* in race or blood.[37] Elsewhere, writing for the same audience, he would refer to *Volk* as the result of the historical interaction of a particular race with a particular landscape — a product of *Blut* and *Heimat*.[38] Yet whenever Freyer sought to define these terms, he did so not according to their literal meaning but according to their social or psychological function. Thus, blood was 'that which comprises our essence, and from which we cannot separate ourselves without degenerating.' *Heimat* was 'that place from which we come and which we cannot abandon without becoming sick.'[39] The key terms in Freyer's programmatic thought were thus tautological metaphors: to write of blood as the ultimate source of collective identity and then to *define* blood as the ultimate source of collective identity is to have added nothing to our knowledge of the actual origin of collective identity. What remains is the affirmation of an image of emotive power, an image which evoked the importance of collective particularity. The various uses of the term *Volk* in Freyer's work of the early 1920s seem to have denoted very little, but they connoted a good deal — namely, the myth of common origin and common cultural substance.

In its second, Machiavellian sense, the *Volk* designated a politicized entity united in common purpose. It was Machiavelli who had first distinguished between those peoples who possessed *virtu* and hence were capable of collective self-defence, and those who lacked this quality and were at the mercy of others.[40] At least since the time of

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35 Freyer, *Theorie* (above, note 8), pp. 111–113.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
37 Freyer, *Prometheus* (above, note 12), pp. 58 and 89.
38 Freyer, *Der Staat* (above, note 13), p. 151.
39 *Ibid.*
40 On Machiavelli's concept of *virtu* see especially J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton, N.J., 1975, Chaps. 6–7; and J. Seigel, 'Virtu in and since the Renaissance,' *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, New York 1974; Q. Skinner, *Machiavelli*,

Fichte and Hegel, Machiavelli's work, and in particular the concept of historical versus unhistorical peoples, had been a source of fascination for German intellectuals. Like others in this tradition, Freyer regarded war as an indispensable element in the creation and preservation of the intense political consciousness which he believed ought to characterize the state. The constant need to prepare for war provided the intensity of emotional commitment which for Freyer was the hallmark of politics — the constant reminder of the primacy of political over particular interests.[41]

Schmitt's 'Total State'

For Schmitt, too, the alternative to bourgeois existence, with its privatized, economic concerns, lay in the realm of what he called 'the political,' which was defined by the potential conflict between states. Among Schmitt's most important works of the Weimar era was 'The Concept of the Political,' which began as an essay in 1927 and was published in expanded form as a book in 1932.

A key confusion runs through the book: on the one hand, Schmitt sought to define 'the political' in purely formal terms, as characterized not by the substance of human relations, but by their intensity. 'The political,' so defined, was based upon the intensity of friend/enemy relations, of relationships of association (friendship) versus those of disassociation. Yet in fact the book was motivated by a concern for a particular kind of relationship: the relationship of antagonism between peoples, the willingness of members of a *Volk* to kill and be killed for the sake of the collective preservation of the *Volk*. The political was defined in contradistinction to the economic and to the realm of economic needs (*Gesellschaft*).[42] The political could not be legitimated on economic grounds. It was 'the most profound assertion of one's own form of collective existence against the negation of this form.'

Oxford 1981, pp. 53ff.; and J.A. Weintraub, 'Virtue, Community and the Sociology of Liberty: The Notion of Republican Virtue and Its Impact on Modern Western Social Thought,' Ph.D. Dissertation, Berkeley, Calif., 1979, Chap. 3. The concept of liberty as popular control, which recent Anglo-American writers have emphasized in their exploration of Machiavelli's thought, was virtually absent from Freyer's discussion. Freyer read Machiavelli as most German thinkers in the nineteenth century had read him: as a prophet of national liberation from foreign domination. On the German reading of Machiavelli see F. Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson* (1924).

41 Freyer, *Der Staat* (above, note 13), pp. 142–149.
42 C. Schmitt, 'Der Begriff des Politischen' (1927), reprinted in *Positionen und Begriffe* (above, note 6), pp. 67–74, at p. 71.

A key passage in Schmitt's essay maintained that 'the fact that a *Volk* no longer has the power or the will to maintain itself in the realm of the political does not mean the disappearance of the political from the world. It means the disappearance of a weak *Volk*.'[43] Now, this statement, narrowly construed, does express the basic truth that the population of a state in a condition of enmity can maintain its political independence only if it is willing to kill and be killed. Given Schmitt's understanding of the international position of Weimar Germany, however, the statement takes on a more bellicose significance. According to Schmitt, the demilitarization of the Rhineland required by the Versailles treaties had left it open to French invasion, thus making its fourteen million German residents into 'the victims of possible war measures ... an atrocious sort of hostage.'[44] The effect of the Versailles sanctions was to leave Germany vulnerable to imminent destruction by its enemies.[45] The 'existential question' facing the German *Reich* was whether it would tolerate such a situation, which was tantamount to the end of its political existence.

Since modern technology was 'making the earth smaller,' in the future only large political units would survive. Either the German *Volk* would demonstrate the political will to remain a world power, Schmitt wrote, or 'its flesh and blood' would be consumed by its enemies.[46] Elsewhere, Schmitt portrayed the League of Nations as a pseudo-moral entity using economistic language to maintain the subjection of Germany and the economic imperialism of the Western powers.[47]

To appreciate the resonances of Schmitt's conception of the political in its historical context, one must thus realize that Schmitt conceived of the Versailles system as signifying, if not the physical genocide of the Germans, then at least their extinction as a great power — that is, as a political *Volk* on the stage of world history — which for him was almost as bad. The views of Freyer and Schmitt on these matters were quite typical of the German political right and even the centre. They refused to accept the defeat of 1918, stressed the need for Germany to remain a great power in Europe and in the world at large, were haunted by

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43 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
44 C. Schmitt, 'Völkerrechtliche Probleme im Rheingebiet' (1928), reprinted in *Positionen und Begriffe* (above, note 6), pp. 97–108, at p. 101.
45 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
46 *Ibid.*, pp. 106–107.
47 Schmitt, 'Begriff' (above, note 42), pp. 77–78.

the memory of the 'Hunger-Blockade' of the war years and dreaded its return.[48]

Schmitt's critique of parliamentarianism, then, must be understood against the background of his assumptions about the relationship between politics, society, and foreign policy. To put these succinctly, authentic politics, in his view, was about the ability of the *Volk* to assert itself in the international arena. A normal state was one in which relations of enmity were directed outward, in which the 'enemy' was foreign.[49] The deficiencies of parliamentary politics in Weimar were of acute concern not because they threatened civil disorder or impeded economic growth, but because, in the face of the Versailles system, the lack of a strong central government threatened the political existence of the German *Volk*, which Schmitt often identified with collective physical existence as such.[50]

The novelty of Schmitt's critique of parliamentary democracy — expressed in a number of his works, beginning with *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parliamentarismus* of 1923 — is often misjudged. It emerges mainly in his contention that the practice of contemporary politics negated arguments made for representative government by nineteenth-century liberals. Those arguments, Schmitt claimed correctly but one-sidedly, had been based on the rationalist belief that open discussion among elected representatives would lead parliamentarians to choose the public good.[51] Contemporary politics, however, was based on disciplined, organized parties that sought to sway voters by means of propaganda, which appealed to economic self-interest and passions. Decisions in parliament were not made on the basis of discussion, and deputies, bound by party discipline, did

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48 See A. Hillgruber, 'Unter dem Schatten von Versailles — Die aussenpolitische Belastung der weimarer Republik — Realität und Perzeption bei den Deutschen,' in K.D. Erdmann and H. Schulze (eds.), *Weimar — Selbstpreisgabe einer Demokratie*, Düsseldorf 1980, pp. 54–55. It is worth recalling that Schmitt served in a legal capacity in the German army at a time when a German empire in the east seemed possible; in 1918 he began work on a constitution for Lithuania, which would have formed part of that empire. See Tommissen, 'Bausteine' (below, Bibliographical Note), p. 76.

49 C. Schmitt, *Hugo Preuss — sein Staatsbegriff und seine Stellung in der deutschen Staatslehre*, Tübingen 1930, p. 26, note 1.

50 See, for example, C. Schmitt, 'Das Problem der innenpolitischen Neutralität des Staates' (1930), reprinted in *Verfassungsrechtliche Aufsätze* (above, note 24), pp. 41–62, at pp. 56–58.

51 C. Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (English transl. by E. Kennedy, Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 34–35. This translation includes a useful introduction by Ellen Kennedy which helps to place Schmitt's work in the context of the legal debates that were taking place in Weimar Germany.

not engage in a rational weighing of the public good, Decisions were therefore no longer made in parliament at all, but 'behind closed doors' in committees, between leaders of party factions.[52]

This critique of parliamentary democracy was hardly new. It had been propounded for years by Maurras and Sorel, both of whom influenced Schmitt. In fact, it was well known among Central European social theorists by the time Schmitt propounded it; three years before his book, in 1920, it was cited as common wisdom by Joseph Schumpeter in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, the most prestigious journal of social science in German-speaking Europe.[53] What was unusual about Schmitt's critique of parliamentary democracy was that it proceeded by measuring contemporary parliamentary practice by the standards of nineteenth-century liberalism, for which Schmitt had no high regard in the first place.[54] The most significant aspects of his analysis were his emphasis on the conflict between liberalism and democracy, his definition of democracy, and the contemporary political ramifications of his analysis.

Schmitt insisted that he was a 'democrat,' opposed to the superannuated 'liberalism' of the nineteenth century. But both his definition of democracy and his conception of the appropriate means for its expression were peculiar. He defined democracy as 'the identity of those who govern with those who are governed.'[55] Its key value was not statistical equality (since it did not regard those who were outside the polity as equal), but equality in the sense of shared substance, or what Schmitt called 'homogeneity.' In the modern period, this took the form of membership in a particular nation. 'A democracy demonstrates its political power,' he wrote, 'by knowing how to reject or keep at bay something foreign that threatens its homogeneity.'[56] In the abstract, there is much to said for this definition: in context and in practice, it must be remembered that Schmitt believed and repeatedly asserted that the Versailles system prevented Germany from possessing just this sort of political power.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–8, 49–50.
53 J. Schumpeter, 'Sozialistische Mouglichkeiten von heute,' *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, XLVIII (1920–1921), pp. 305–360, at pp. 328–331.
54 As noted by Maschke in 'Drei Motive' (below, Bibliographical Note), p. 63.
55 C. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus*, Berlin 1926[2], p. 20. I have departed slightly from the translation by Ellen Kennedy on p. 14 of the English edition (above, note 51).
56 Schmitt, *Crisis* (above, note 51), p. 9.

Democracy, for Schmitt, was a political form based upon a shared sense of belonging together. Real democracy, as Schmitt understood it, did away with the 'disintegrating' pursuit of private interest which multi-party elections encouraged. By Schmitt's reckoning, the Italian Fascist election of 1928, in which the voters chose for or against a single list of candidates, was more democratic, since it allowed the 'unity of the *Volk*' to express itself in the electoral process.[57] Time and again, Schmitt claimed that the liberal institution of the secret ballot was antidemocratic, since it allowed and encouraged the individual to express his private interest. Dictatorship and caesarism, on the other hand, allowed for the 'immediate expression of the democratic substance and power' of the *Volk*.[58]

Freyer and Schmitt, in their analysis and critique of Weimar democracy, drew upon Rousseau's recasting of the civic republican tradition in terms of the distinction between *citoyen* and *bourgeois*, which they both correlated with the Hegelian distinction between state and society. Both regarded the state as the realm of the political, in which the key public interest was the expansion of German power, while society was the private realm of production and consumption. Their analysis owed much to a Hegelian tradition that criticized contemporary politics for the encroachment of the economic interests of civil society upon the state, a tradition that reached back to Lorenz von Stein and to Marx.[59]

In 1931, Schmitt published *The Protector of the Constitution*, in which he brought together a series of arguments which he had put forward in essays published during the previous three years. The Weimar state, he argued, had become subordinated to the pluralistic social interests of civil society, which robbed it of its unity and sovereignty.[60] This reflected what Schmitt took to be a false understanding of pluralism: legitimate pluralism existed not in the domination of the state by competing socio-economic interest groups, but in the competition among the cultures of the *Völker*, each embodied in its own state.[61]

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57 C. Schmitt, 'Wesen und Werden des fascistischen Staates,' *Schmollers Jahrbuch*, LIII (1929), pp. 107–113, at p. 109.

58 Schmitt, *Geistesgeschichtliche Lage* (above, note 55), pp. 22–23, 50; idem, *Verfassungslehre*, Munich 1928, pp. 244–246 — though elsewhere in the *Verfassungslehre*, one of the more scholarly and balanced of Schmitt's works, he could also make a case for the necessity of parties as the representatives of 'public opinion' in a democracy.

59 Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* (see preceding note), p. 253.

60 C. Schmitt, 'Staatsethik und Pluralistischer Staat,' *Kantstudien*, XXXV (1930), pp. 28–42, at pp. 28–31; and idem, *Der Hüter der Verfassung*, Berlin 1931, pp. 71–88.

61 Schmitt, 'Staatsethik' (see preceding note), pp. 37–40.

The contemporary state was 'neo-feudal': it reflected the pluralistic interests of civil society as represented in parliamentary parties.[62] As a consequence, wrote Schmitt, the state was becoming a 'total state,' forced by politically organized social interests to intervene in ever-widening areas of society. Here the term 'total state' had an opprobrious connotation.[63] To be sure, it was inevitable that the state would play a large part in the economy, but the Weimar state was incapable of exercising the legislative authority demanded by this new reality, because parliament now served to divide the state's power among politically organized social interests.[64]

In Schmitt's writings of the late 1920s and early 1930s, his earlier criticism of the contemporary state on moral and political grounds (for its inability to rally the *Volk* to a more activistic foreign policy) gave way to an emphasis on the absolute paralysis of decision-making which resulted from a splintered party system that reflected so wide a divergence of economic, religious and political interests. Writing in the final weeks before Hitler's appointment as chancellor, Schmitt contrasted the contemporary weak, indecisive 'purely quantitative' total state with the ideal of the 'qualitative' total state:

> The total state in this sense is an especially strong state. It is total with respect to its quality and its energy, what the Fascists call the *stato totalitario*, by which they mean primarily that the new means of power belong exclusively to the state and serve the purpose of augmenting its power. Such a state allows no forces to arise within it which might be inimical to it, limit it, or fragment it. It does not think of surrendering the new means of power to its enemies and destroyers and allowing its power to be undermined by categories such as liberalism, *Rechtsstaat*, or whatever. Such a state can distinguish friend from foe.[65]

The institutional locus of this strong state was to be the *Reich's* president, ruling through the bureaucracy, with the support of the army, and legitimated in some never-clearly-defined sense through acclamation.[66]

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62 Schmitt, *Hugo Preuss* (above, note 49), p. 21; idem, *Hüter* (above, note 60), pp. 84–88.
63 Idem, 'Die Wendung zum totalen Staat,' *Europäische Revue* (April 1931), pp. 241–250, at pp. 242–243; idem, *Hüter* (above, note 60), pp. 78–88.
64 Schmitt, 'Wendung' (see preceding note), p. 247, and *Hüter* (above, note 60), pp. 108ff.
65 C. Schmitt, 'Weiterentwicklung des totalen Staats in Deutschland,' *Europäische Revue* (February 1933), reprinted in Schmitt, *Verfassungsrechtliche Aufsätze* (above, note 24), pp. 359–365, at p. 361.
66 Schmitt, *Hüter* (above, note 60), pp. 108–159; 'Weiterentwicklung' (see preceding note), p. 365.

This was the intellectual basis of Schmitt's political role as a member of the circle around General Kurt von Schleicher.

The 'Revolution von rechts'

In an essay published in late 1929, Schmitt wrote that behind the façade of contemporary political exhaustion a new elite was forming, which, relinquishing the security of the status quo, and would represent a return to basic principles. From the perspective of the existing status quo, this regenerative elite would appear 'as a cultural or social nothing.'[67] Early in 1931, Freyer published *Revolution von rechts*, which was devoted to an analysis of what he, too, in a deliberate paraphrase of Abbé Sièyes, contended was 'nothing' in the political order of the present, but would become 'everything' in the new political order.

What lay between Schmitt's cryptic suggestion of late 1929 and Freyer's political pamphlet was, of course, the general election of September 1930, in which the National Socialists emerged as a major electoral force. Though never mentioned explicitly, it was the potential transformation of German politics represented by this movement which was the pamphlet's central point of reference. For Freyer, National Socialism represented the rising forces of the twentieth century against the ossified forces of the nineteenth. It meant that the politicized *Volk* was finally ready to reject a social and political order based upon the pursuit of self-interest.

'The nineteenth century,' in Freyer's usage, was not a chronological designation; rather, it referred to the mind-set characteristic of capitalist, industrial society. Individual and collective action in industrial society, according to Freyer, was based on 'interest,' the pursuit of individual or group advantage.[68] The natural social units of industrial society thus were classes, groups organized for the pursuit of collective interests. Industrial society was consequently in a permanent state of revolution from below, of chronic or acute class conflict.[69]

Freyer saw historical materialism as the mode of thought most appropriate to industrial society, and the Marxist movement as the most significant political phenomenon of 'the nineteenth century' in both its chronological and its cultural sense. Marxism, by recognizing the dominant role of economic interests in modern society, made explicit

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67 Schmitt, 'Das Zeitalter' (above, note 26), p. 131.
68 H. Freyer, *Revolution von rechts*, Jena 1931, pp. 19, 34 and 38.
69 *Ibid.*, pp. 9 and 15.

the real dynamics of industrial society in the nineteenth century.[70]

In *Revolution von rechts*, Freyer first analyzed what he called 'the self-liquidation of the nineteenth century.' He asserted that the socialist movement of the working class — the embodiment of the hope for a revolution from the left that would transcend industrial society — had definitively and irrevocably been absorbed into capitalist, industrial society. In response to the successful political organization of the proletariat, politics had been transformed into a struggle over material welfare: by means of governmentally enacted social provisions, industrial society had moved from the era of *laissez-faire* to the new era of industrial society in its socially expanded form. In this new era, the material condition of the proletariat was ameliorated sufficiently to lift it above the absolute misery which Marx — quite rightly, in Freyer's estimation — had deemed necessary for socialist revolution to occur. Thus, Freyer wrote, the revisionist socialists of the turn of the century had merely been speaking the truth about what their movement had become: a non-revolutionary movement that sought an expansion of rights and benefits within industrial society.[71] The essential elements of capitalism had remained intact.[72]

Freyer thus stressed the unexpectedly successful capacity of welfare-state capitalism to co-opt its opposition and defuse revolutionary challenges. It was this disappearance of realistic hopes for a revolution from the left that Freyer dubbed 'the self-liquidation of the nineteenth century.'

Much of *Revolution von rechts* was devoted to dissecting of the role of the state in industrial society. Echoing Schmitt, Freyer claimed that the state had become no more than a broker between organized social interests.[73] The rise of the socialist movement and its integration into industrial society through government social policy (*Sozialpolitik*) had turned the state into a battleground for organized social and economic interests. Parliamentary democracy meant nothing more — or less — than the surrender of the state to umbrella organizations of interest groups.[74] Such a state, Freyer wrote, lacked the essential attributes of a real state, namely, supremacy over industrial society, a 'binding collective consciousness,' and continuity of purpose. 'It is the sum of

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70 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
71 *Ibid.*, pp. 26–28, 33.
72 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
73 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 58–60.
74 *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 59–60.

all that is unpolitical,' he concluded.[75] Since industrial society reduced human beings to producers and consumers, it had failed to provide the individual with a sense of belonging to a larger whole. It was this pent-up discontent with the inability of industrial society to provide a higher meaning or collective purpose to its members that Freyer saw as the real source of the new revolution from the right.[76]

The term *Volk* in *Revolution von rechts* was used in its neo-Machiavellian sense, as referring to all those who refused to define themselves in terms of social class and economic self-interest. The source of Freyer's enthusiasm for the gathering momentum of National Socialism is not difficult to discover. He saw in it a mass embodiment of that cultural critique of modernity which had been developed by earlier generations of German social theorists and which lay at the heart of his own work.[77]

Freyer devoted the final chapter of *Revolution von rechts* to an evocation of the new order that the revolution would create. The new state was to be 'freed' of the egoistical demands of industrial society in order to engage in real history — namely, in the consolidation of the *Volk* for the sake of collective self-assertion and the acquisition of temporal power.[78] This was the higher collective purpose to which all were to be subordinated. The capitalist economy with its logic of production for profit was to be replaced by state socialism (*Staatssozialismus*), in which production would take place for the sake of collective historical self-assertion.[79]

The new state would continue and expand what Freyer regarded as the two greatest accomplishments of industrial society: the development of technology and the emergence of governmental social policy (*Sozialpolitik*). Yet the significance of each would be transformed. Technological modes of thought would now be clearly subordinated to those of politics.[80] Government social measures would continue to be enacted not because of the struggles of social groups acting on the basis of egoistic self-interest, but by virtue of a truly collective ethos that would pervade the new state.[81] The role of the state would be one of ongoing intervention for the purpose of shaping the social order.[82]

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75 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
76 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49.
77 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
78 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
79 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.
80 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
81 *Ibid.*, pp. 67–70.
82 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

The new state brought about by the 'revolution from the right' would thus combine technology and social organization with the 'infinitely deep roots' of the *Volk*.[83] It would solve the problem to which Freyer's work had been devoted: the reconciliation of modern technology with a sense of collective identity and individual meaning rooted in the particularist past. Freyer saw in the revolution from the right the mass political embodiment of his own *Kulturkritik*, and the possibility, at least, of realizing the 'total' state that he had long advocated.

That is how the revolution from the right looked to Hans Freyer in theory. In practice, it would look rather different.[84]

Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer were both men of great intelligence and broad learning. Like other moral diagnosticians whose radical critiques helped delegitimate liberal-capitalist democracies, they stressed the cost of such societies with little awareness of their benefits; they judged them wanting against romanticized models from the past, while remaining so vague about future alternatives that it became impossible to weigh the costs and benefits of the existing regimes against them. The danger of such critics is that their unbalanced assessment may attract them to a political cure that is worse than the disease itself. That is what happened to Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt, and to countless other members of the German educated classes, who, influenced by such critiques, were lured toward another god that failed.

Bibliographical Note

Among the significant recent contributions to scholarship on Schmitt is Joseph Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton 1983), which has done a good deal to clarify Schmitt's political connections and legal positions during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Unfortunately (as a number of sympathetic reviewers have noted in both English and German reviews), the book is weak in its handling of Schmitt's ideas, isolating his particular legal positions from the larger context of his work, and it neglects the relationship of Schmitt's ideas to those of the wider radical right in Weimar. Many of these errors are compounded in Bendersky's essay, 'Carl Schmitt and the Conservative Revolution,' *Telos* (Summer 1987), pp. 27–42. There, for example, Bendersky claims that none of Schmitt's writings was

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83 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
84 See Muller, *Other God* (above, note 3), Chaps. 7–8.

published by journals associated with the conservative revolution (p. 37); while he later excepts three minor articles (p. 40), he overlooks the publication of several of Schmitt's important essays in the radical conservative *Europäische Revue*. More substantively, Bendersky writes that Schmitt's 'primary point of agreement with Stapel and Günther was the presidential system and the need to contain the National Socialists. But whereas Stapel and Günther looked to the presidential system as a transition to a new authoritarian state, Schmitt favoured the strengthening of state power within the existing constitutional framework.' In fact, Günther hoped to use the National Socialists to bring about radical conservative goals (see A.E. Günther [ed.], *Was wir vom Nationalsozialismus erwarten*, Heilbronn 1932), while 'a new authoritarian state' was precisely what Schmitt hoped to achieve through his interpretation of 'the existing constitutional framework.'

Guy Oakes, in his introduction to the English translation of Schmitt's *Political Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986, pp. x–xi), asserts that Schmitt's legal doctrine of the 'equal chance' (according to which the state did not have to give an equal chance to parties which intended to use their democratically obtained power to transform the political order) was aimed at both the Communists and the National Socialists, and that Schmitt's newspaper article of July, 1932, advised against voting for the Nazis. Both claims are inaccurate. In fact, Schmitt used his doctrine of the 'equal chance' to argue in favour of the Papen government's seizure of power from the Social Democratic government of Prussia. The warning against voting for the Nazis quoted by Oakes comes not from Schmitt's article, but from an afterword appended to it by the editors of the newspaper in which it appeared (see Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt*, pp. 153–159).

Among the most useful guides to Schmitt's thought among recent scholars is Günther Maschke. A former radical leftist turned radical rightist, Maschke emphatically and empathetically shares Schmitt's fundamental antiliberal sympathies, and this has made him an unusually sensitive reader of Schmitt's work. Moreover, the attention Maschke has lavished on Schmitt's writings and their intellectual sources has made him aware of important characteristics of Schmitt's work that have eluded many readers. Maschke notes that Schmitt's key concepts are striking without being clear; that Schmitt's key works and concepts do not fit together into a coherent whole; that his works are not scholarly in the usual sense and that the influence of his writings is due more to their suggestiveness than to careful argumentation. Especially useful, because it is relatively unpolemical, is Maschke's essay, 'Drei

Motive im Anti-Liberalismus Carl Schmitts,' in Klaus Hansen and Hans Lietzmann (eds.), *Carl Schmitt und die Liberalismuskritik* (Opladen 1988), pp. 55–79. Maschke's *Der Tod des Carl Schmitt — Apologie und Polemik* (Vienna 1987), while both polemical and apologetic as its title implies, provides a critical overview of recent writing on Schmitt in several languages.

Of varying but generally high quality are the essays and discussions included in Helmut Quaritsch (ed.), *Complexio Oppositorum — Über Carl Schmitt* (Berlin 1988). Richest in biographical information on Schmitt are the essay by Piet Tommissen, 'Bausteine zu einer wissenschaftlichen Biographie (Periode: 1888–1933),' pp. 71–100, and the discussion that follows. Ellen Kennedy's article, 'Politischer Expressionismus: Die kulturkritischen und metaphysischen Ursprünge des Begriffs des Politischen von Carl Schmitt,' and the discussion that follows treat the connection between Schmitt's early *Kulturkritik* and his critique of liberalism. On this theme see also Kennedy's article, 'Carl Schmitt und Hugo Ball: Ein Beitrag zum Thema "[Politischer Expressionismus"],' *Zeitschrift für Politik* (June 1988), pp. 143–161.   .

Jacob Taubes's book, *Ad Carl Schmitt — Gegenstrebige Fügung* (Berlin 1987), is idiosyncratic and apologetic, though of some use in tracing Schmitt's contacts and influence. Bernd Rüthers, in *Entartetes Recht — Rechtslehren und Kronjuristen im Dritten Reich* (Munich 1988), reviews most of the secondary literature on Schmitt's character and career and offers a fair synthesis (*ibid.*, pp. 99–175).

PART III:
FRANCE — CRITIQUE OF LIBERALISM
AND THE HERITAGE OF
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Denis Hollier

A Farewell to the Pen

i

The oft-cited quip attributed to Goering — 'When I hear people talking about culture, I reach for my gun' — is generally used to illustrate the contempt displayed by Nazism for intellectual life. And yet, throughout the 1930s, many antifascist thinkers of the left bandied exactly the same sort of slogan. The young Marx himself had set the example by declaring that the weapon of criticism would never replace the criticism of weapons. However, the specific context of Goering's statement is never mentioned. His gun is generally interpreted as representing a weapon aimed at culture, whereas he might have meant something entirely different — for instance, 'Speaking of culture, let me show you mine. It's a gun!'

There was a genuine fad for guns in French culture during the 1930s and 1940s. This explains the very respectable number of avant-garde writers whose 'farewell to the pen' was every bit as influential as Hemingway's 'Farewell to Arms.' Stendhal liked to say that a political discussion was as out of place in a novel as a gunshot in a concert hall. From Malraux to Breton, from Drieu la Rochelle to Sartre, an entire generation was haunted by the alchemical dream of turning fountain pens into firearms. This was no mere matter, as in Stendhal's time, of introducing a gun into a literary work; it was a matter of turning the work itself into a gun — turning blank pages into point blank. Words, as Sartre would put it, were loaded pistols. These writers had a conception of language that was anything but parliamentary. What they demanded was not freedom of expression, but rather — to use the strange but powerful phrase later coined by Maurice Blanchot — the right to death.

The difference between a pen and a gun, between literature and politics, between fiction and verbal action, is inherent in the very definition of liberalism. Fiction's extra-territoriality is part and parcel of what political liberalism is. It is one of the precepts of liberalism

that the practice of literature, linked to *individual* freedom, lies outside the sphere of what Benjamin Constant called *political* freedom.[1] That, explicitly, is why the 'committed writers' (*écrivains engagés*) of the 1930s rejected liberalism. They were not interested in a freedom of expression that would keep them at a safe distance from the public arena. They rejected the liberal distinction between politics and literature. 'We want to be judged on the basis not of our words, but of our deeds,' said Sartre in one of his most oft-repeated statements.

In the transition from pen to gun, or from ink to blood, language loses several of its properties. For instance, while it is true that words, like weapons, produce effects, it is also true that weapons, unlike words, have no representative function. Words represent things; weapons destroy them. To write politically committed fiction is to aspire to a realism no longer representative but performative, in which words are no longer signs for things, but have become things in themselves. Instead of detaching itself from reality in order to represent it, language is asked to attack reality in order to destroy it. It becomes the instrument of a negative, explosive intervention. However, my purpose here is not simply to oppose descriptive to performative language. The question is not so much whether or not words are instruments as whether or not they are weapons. In other words, the crucial factor here is not the difference between saying and doing, but rather the identity between saying and killing ... as well as between saying and dying.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that this topic was first broached in a work that was overtly apolitical. Lafcadio, the hero of André Gide's 1914 novel, *Les caves du Vatican* (*Lafcadio's Adventures*), rejects writing out of hand. Even before Goering, he draws his irreversible instrument when he hears people talking about culture: 'You know what spoils writing for me? All the corrections, all the scratching-out and fixing-up you are able to do.'[2] Lafcadio cannot bear the identity of a trace and its erasure. He wants things to be ineffaceable, irreversible, impossible to change once they have been done. He therefore opposes literature to life — in which, as he puts it, ' "you can't correct what has been done. It's the right to retouch that makes writing so grey and so..." (he did not finish his sentence).

1 An excellent presentation of Constant's definition of liberalism appears in T. Todorov, 'Freedom and Repression during the Restoration,' in D. Hollier, *A New History of French Literature*, Cambridge, Mass. 1989, pp. 617–623.
2 A. Gide, *Les caves du Vatican*, in *Romans*, ed. Yvonne Davet et Jean-Jacques Thierry, Paris 1958, p. 736.

"Yes, that's what I find so beautiful about life — you've got to paint in the fresh. You're not allowed to scratch out."' Painting or writing in the fresh, *al fresco*, and even in the flesh, transforming writing into a question of life and death, is the essential motif of committed literature.

At the end of *Les Caves du Vatican*, Lafcadio prepares himself to commit the gratuitous homicide that is to transform him into the hero without a cause, the hero of causelessness of the entire post-Proust generation. The theme of irreversibility recurs just as he is about to push Fleurissoire out of a moving train. Earlier in the book, he had extolled the virtues of irreversible events and unretouchable acts, as opposed to literature. Now literature has disappeared, and the scene is unfolding live before our eyes. Lafcadio is thinking aloud: 'And you have no more right to change your move than in a game of chess ... Come on, come on, Cadio — no retouching.'[3] And he throws Fleurissoire through the door. Nevertheless, *Les Caves du Vatican* is still not a *roman engagé*. There is nothing political about Lafcadio's act of murder. Could one imagine a militant Lafcadio? In his *Nouvelles nourritures terrestres*, Gide himself, now a Communist, calls Nathanaël a comrade. But it is Malraux, in creating the character of Kyo in *La condition humaine (Man's Fate)*, who finally turns Lafcadio into a political terrorist.

Again, what is being celebrated in this literature is the absence of representation, the impossibility of rehearsing — the fact that signs, insofar as they exist, are one with things themselves, rather than being detached from things in order to represent them. As Gisors puts it, 'Theatre is not a serious matter; bullfighting is.'[4]

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A thematic inventory of this literature would highlight two motifs which, in their connection to war, reveal the powerfully antiliberal dimension of these authors' inspiration. The first of these motifs is authority; the second is brotherhood. Liberal society is accused of being afraid of the former and inhospitable to the latter. War, because it curbs liberalism, is counted upon to restore both.

3   *Ibid.*, p. 830.
4   A. Malraux, *La condition humaine*, in *Romans*, Paris 1976, p. 508.

Authority

Authority is a linguistic phenomenon — a property of speech which, like the 'presence' of an actor, emanates from the tone of voice or manner of speaking of a particular person. The authority of spoken words is recognizable in that, rather than engendering more speeches (as do parliamentary speeches), they engender acts (as do military orders). Authoritarian speech does not instruct, inform or convince — it commands. One does not reply to it, one obeys. That is why the critique of medieval authoritarian (or Leonine) argument is the founding principle of all systems of free thought. In liberal societies, one does not think on command.

The revaluation of authoritarian speech acts, in and of itself, is a major symptom of the antiliberal attitude that inspired so many writers of the 1930s. This rejection of the structure of liberal dialogue is exemplified by the objective set out by Paul Nizan in *Les chiens de garde* (The Watchdogs) for his dealings with the philosophical establishment of the Third Republic: 'We wish not to convince them (*les convaincre*) but to vanquish them (*les vaincre*).'[5] To assert its authority, the verbal weapon must function unidirectionally, setting up an asymmetrical exchange: the receiver is not expected to answer or speak up.

The anticonformist trend that informed the politically committed literature of the 1930s and 1940s was launched in 1929 by two brilliant, untidy pamphlets by Emmanuel Berl, *The Death of Bourgeois Thought* and *The Death of Bourgeois Morality*. The word 'bourgeois' here is strictly synonymous with 'liberal': thus, bourgeois thought and morality meant freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, the liberal arts — an entire culture that thrived on the notions of free time and total independence, with no sense of urgency, oblivious to the knife at the throat, to matters of life and death.

One passage in these pamphlets is strikingly illustrative of the connection — a somewhat surprising one, after all — between anti-conformism and conversion to authoritarianism. Berl stated that liberal society was torn by its attempt to evolve simultaneously in two opposite directions, which he defined in terms of religious persuasion. On the one hand, the bourgeoisie was becoming increasingly Protestant — even if it didn't know it, and even if its Protestantism was unconscious and unacknowledged. Today's bourgeois, including those who still claimed to be Catholic, said Berl, were all individuals who felt 'more sure of

5   P. Nizan, *Les chiens de garde*, Paris 1931, p. 119.

their morals and consciences than they [were] of their sacraments and spiritual mentors.'[6] Protestantism, according to this definition (morals versus sacraments, conscience versus mentors), was essentially the religion of free thought, of individual conscience or rationality; it was the model of a religion without mentors. Simultaneously with this evolution within the bourgeoisie, many intellectuals, tending in the opposite direction, were becoming 'far more attracted to Catholicism than [to] Protestantism,' in Berl's words.[7]

These labels were not, of course, to be taken literally; above and beyond the matter of religious affiliation, they established a distinction along the lines of spiritual direction. Whereas the bourgeoisie was adopting the system of free thought, intellectuals were opting in favour, if not of Catholicism itself, then at least of the submission to intellectual authority (or the intellectual acceptance of authority) that Catholicism had always embodied. This was an exact reversal of their respective positions during the Dreyfus Affair, when the intellectuals had defined themselves precisely by their exercise of free thought in opposition to the notions of unimpeachable authority and military discipline. Now they were expressing an uncanny nostalgia for authority (though it was not always clear whether they wished to wield this authority or be subjected to it).

Ten years later, in 1939, the former surrealist Jules Monnerot launched the last of the great post-war ideological surveys in an avant-garde journal called *Volontés*.[8] His questionnaire dealt precisely with the issue of spiritual direction in modern civilization. The very terms in which it was formulated, as well as the responses it elicited, show that Berl's wishes had been heard and fulfilled. Most of Monnerot's respondents described a modern world in which free thought was not only in constant regression, but had been superseded by various types of spiritual mentorship that were scarcely better than medieval theocracy, ranging from psychoanalysis to totalitarian political parties.

In his conclusion, Monnerot emphasized that not one of his respondents had spoken positively about parliamentary democracies. Thus, he concluded, the only alternatives available to the French, 'disgusted with democracy and contemptuous of Fascism,' were those

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6   E. Berl, *Mort de la morale bourgeoise*, Paris 1965, p. 165. The chapter is entitled 'Protestantisme catholique, protestantisme juif et protestantisme laïque.'

7   *Ibid.*, p. 164.

8   Reproduced in part in D. Hollier (ed.), *The College of Sociology (1937–1939)* (English transl. by Betsy Wing), Minneapolis 1988, pp. 47–68.

that entailed action — 'intellectual action, of course, but also literal, military action.'[9] I shall return in a moment to the way in which this military option seems to crop up as soon as one has despaired of liberalism, serving as a neurotic compromise solution for those who, though they may claim to be contemptuous of Fascism, can feel nothing but disgust for democracy.

Most of these calls for authority — those of Berl, of Monnerot in 1939, and of Monnerot's respondents — were both conceived and perceived as being in keeping with the values of the extreme left. For instance, it was a communist press, the Editions Sociales Internationales, that published — despite its strangely medieval title — Roger Caillois's journal, *Inquisitions*. Caillois fervently advocated a revaluation of authoritative forms, writing one manifesto after another in favour of what he called a 'militant orthodoxy.' Authority, he claimed, is attributable to those who constrain without seeking to persuade — and, as he wrote in a review article, it was precisely because Léon Blum had failed to recognize this, or refused to admit it, that he had fallen from power.[10] In the same period, Jean Paulhan expressed identical concerns, studying the authoritativeness of what he called 'proverbial enunciation' (famous statements, political slogans and so forth — the whole range of what might be described as authoritarian figures of speech), and the decisive role an authoritarian rhetoric played in the effect (or effects) produced by a sentence or discourse independently of its meaning — that is, independently of the intellectual validity of its content.[11]

However, the most important piece of writing having to do with this revaluation of authority was undoubtedly the program drawn up by Georges Bataille for *Contre-Attaque*, the extreme leftist group that he founded with André Breton at the time of the Popular Front in 1936. In this manifesto, entitled 'Toward a Real Revolution,' Bataille condemned the anachronistic character of most contemporary revolutionary movements, which, in order to overthrow existing liberal governments, resorted to models of action that had been created a century earlier for use against autocratic regimes. 'No stable democratic regime,' he pointed out, 'has ever been overthrown by a classical

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9 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
10 Callois's review appeared in *La nouvelle revue française*, no. 287 (October 1937), pp. 673–676. Quoted in Hollier, *College* (above, note 8), pp. 125–126.
11 J. Paulhan, 'Sacred Language,' in Hollier, *College* (above, note 8), pp. 304–321.

revolution.'[12] All the classical revolutions had been anti-authoritarian in character, seeking to replace autocratic governments with liberal ones.

The crucial distinction revolved, once again, around the issue of authority. What was unbearable about autocracy was the presence of authority; what is unbearable about democracy is its absence: 'It must be fought not as authority,' wrote Bataille, 'but rather as the absence of authority.'[13] It followed that the strategies required to achieve the breakdown of authority had become totally obsolete when what was needed was a reconstitution of authority. Thus, the model of an anti-authoritarian left opposing a militarized right no longer held up. The left had no choice but to embrace the concept of authority — on pain of disappearing, as had happened to the Italian and German left. Bataille concluded by demanding that the Popular Front, then in the process of formation, set up 'coherent and disciplined forces, organized to reconstitute the foundations of the structure of authority within a democracy in the process of decomposition.'[14]

We should recall that Bataille, a theoretician of the *informe*, had been a stalwart advocate of revolutionary anti-authoritarianism before Hitler's rise to power, and his appeal to the values of authority and discipline was part of an antifascist strategy. Nevertheless, by virtue of its inspiration, it was profoundly (and explicitly) antidemocratic, advocating as it did the restoration of the very forms that the institution of democracy was meant to oppose. The struggle against Fascism, Bataille believed, had to undermine democratic procedure if it was to be effective. This analysis had an implication of which Bataille himself would become aware only several years later, after Munich: the only one weapon that could be used against a liberal government was war. There never had been and probably never would be an antiliberal revolution. To destroy a democracy, it was essential, and sometimes sufficient, to have an army (not necessarily a foreign army), or else a party organized along the lines of an army. As in Monnerot's questionnaire, the revaluation of authority is closely connected here with the spectre of a military government — that is, with the suspension of democratic liberties.

L'espoir (Man's hope), André Malraux's 1937 novel about the Spanish Civil War (written while it was still in progress), can be viewed as a

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12 G. Bataille, 'Toward a Real Revolution' (English transl. by Annette Michelson), *October*, no. 36 (Spring 1986), p. 34.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

literary application of Bataille's programme. Malraux starts out with the postulate that democracies are indefensible, at least in a military sense — which of course is the only sense that counts in time of war. 'I have seen democracies intervene against anything and everything, but not against Fascism,' says one character in the novel.[15] Those who wish to fight Fascism, then, must forget about democracy. At the time of *Contre-Attaque*, Bataille hoped to transform the Popular Front from an instrument of antifascist defence into one of what he called *sur-fasciste* (supra-Fascist) counter-attack. *L'espoir* follows the same programme. The novel describes how a revolution is transformed into a war — how a spontaneous, generous, anarchist insurrection can organize itself into a revolutionary army capable of measuring up to the Fascist army and counter-attacking it.

The key word in this transformative process, as Manuel, the novel's central protagonist, discovers, is authority. After their defeat at Toledo, the Republican troops have panicked and beaten a disorderly retreat. Manuel starts talking, and his words restore order among the troops. Suddenly, without his knowing how or why, they become orders. Malraux comments, 'He had learned authority.'[16] However, it is not just anyone who has this experience of political, antisentimental education. It so happens that Manuel had been an artist — a musician who, until Franco's *coup d'etat*, had worked as a sound engineer in Barcelona's film industry. Among the many transformations that give the novel its structure — revolution turning into war, indignation turning into an army — there is the artist who becomes a leader, bidding farewell to music. Aesthetic distance has disappeared, to be replaced by pragmatic emergency. To return again to Goering's phrase, Manuel draws his gun without even waiting for people to talk to him about culture. For him, this is not a matter of putting his art at the service of the revolution, or even of inventing revolutionary art: it is a renunciation of art so that the revolution may take place. In time of war, art itself, culture itself, have become counter-revolutionary.

Malraux conceived Manuel's military authority as the distinguishing feature of an artist who has renounced being an artist. Military authority, in this sense, is the reward of the artist who has given up his vocation, abandoned the world of aesthetic pleasure, sacrificed his oeuvre. Manuel's authority derives precisely from the sacrifice through which he has renounced being what he is and put his selfhood in

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15 A. Malraux, *L'espoir*, Paris 1937, p. 138.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 284.

parentheses. On several occasions, he remarks that he has been severed from music. More essentially, he has been severed from what he is by what he does. By entering the world of action, he has separated himself from himself. Significantly, when he speaks in order to be obeyed, he does not recognize his own voice. The voice of authority is, after all, the voice of an artist who has renounced himself, who does not want to answer and does not recognize his vocation. 'You've got to give up your soul,' another leader tells him. 'You've already given up your long hair and the sound of your voice.'[17] War functions here as what Husserl would call an époché; it is a means of engendering a transcendental consciousness, detached from its transcendent ego — which, as Sartre demonstrated, is the same as having no ego at all.

From this perspective, it is interesting to compare Malraux's Manuel with the portrait of Léon Blum sketched by Roger Caillois in the aforementioned article, a 1938 review of two books Blum had just published: a volume of political speeches entitled *L'exercice du pouvoir* (The exercise of power), and a volume of literary essays entitled *Nouvelles conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann* (More conversations between Goethe and Eckermann). Malraux's hero becomes a leader by renouncing music. According to Caillois, Blum had failed because the exercise of power had no impact on him as a man of taste. The Prime Minister remained a citizen in the Republic of Letters. A liberal and a gentleman, he would never have drawn his gun when people talked to him about culture.

Brotherhood

The second salient motif in this literature is brotherhood. On various occasions, characters in *Man's Hope* comment on the Republican motto, 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.' Generally speaking, equality, a quantitative concept, is seen as disuniting, almost harmful. Liberty is not discussed. Fraternity, however, is guaranteed to arouse emotion. Unlike equality, which is dispersive and numerical (or as Sartre would have said, serial) in character, brotherhood is above all the sense that one is not alone, that one forms part of a whole (or as Sartre called it, a group in fusion) and has gotten away from individualistic isolation. Thus, the theme of brotherhood, like that of authority, is strongly imbued with antiliberalism.

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 483.

It is also imbued with bellicosity, or even a love of war. The army and military action provide individuals with an ideal framework within which to experience 'togetherness', *Mitsein* (a form of brotherhood rendered all the more intense by the fact that women were excluded from military service[18]). War allows individuals to break free of the serial, egalitarian solitude of liberal capitalism, and to participate together in something that transcends them. While liberalism is incapable of giving men a cause worth dying for, war, by producing togetherness, offers a remedy to the disintegration of the world into individual units. The risk of death allows the individual to transcend himself, escape from individualistic dispersion, and draw fresh strength from the whole of which he is a part. A character in *L'espoir* uses a cliché of Gestalt psychology to express this sense of belonging to an unanalyzable totality: 'Taken as a whole, this squadron is nobler than any of the men who make it up.'[19] As we read further on in *L'espoir*, 'there is a brotherhood that can only be found on the far side of death.'[20]

The concept of brotherhood-in-arms has often been exploited in order to give totalitarianism a good name. Indeed, it is possible only on the condition of a militarization of daily life, which itself presupposes a total suspension of liberal legality. The glorification of the army (and of war) under the auspices of brotherhood, for these novelists, is merely a way of smuggling in the totalitarian aspects of the military structure itself. Scali, another character in *L'espoir*, expresses this quite simply when he says:

> Totalitarian civilization ... in the twentieth century is a meaningless term; it is as if you had said the army is a totalitarian civilization. In actual fact, the only man who, when confronted with a whole, looks for a real totality is the intellectual.[21]

Indeed, one may wonder if anything would be gained by saying that so-called totalitarian regimes are nothing more than militarized civilizations? Why should a government that is run by an army — or, failing that, by a party that is run by an army — not be called totalitarian? The most significant thing about Scali's argument (Scali himself fought on the side of the Republicans) is his description of the

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18 See my book on Sartre, *The Politics of Prose: Essays on Jean-Paul Sartre* (English transl. by Jeffrey Mehlman), Minneapolis 1986, pp. 178ff.
19 Malraux, *L'espoir*, p. 379.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 436.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 465.

desire for totality (including, by implication, total militarization and totalitarian militarism) as one that is specific to the intellectual. That is why, despite the fact that it was fighting Fascism, or indeed because of that fact, the Republican army posed no less serious a threat to democracy than the army it opposed.

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Elie Halévy, the historian of English liberalism and European socialism, gave a lecture to the French Philosophical Society in 1937 on what he called 'The Era of Tyrannies.' He was to die shortly thereafter, and his thesis was as sombre as a lifetime that was drawing to a close at the end of the 1930s: war and democracy could not coexist.

According to Halévy, the era of tyrannies had begun with World War I. The summer of 1914 marked the end of the liberal era and the establishment throughout Europe of a general state of siege. Civilian existence itself had been organized along the lines of a wartime model. Halévy's diagnosis applied to all post-war totalitarian regimes: little did it matter to him, for instance, that communism (unlike Fascism) defined itself as a pacifist, antimilitaristic ideology. As he wrote,

> The irony of post-war socialism is [precisely] that it recruits adherents among those who embrace it out of hatred and disgust for war, only to offer them a platform consisting of an extension of war measures into times of peace.[22]

Politics, here, is the continuation of war by different means.

Halévy's analyses were elaborated in a very different intellectual context from those of Georges Bataille, and yet the logic behind them was quite similar. It implied that a democratic government could never be overthrown by revolution. It considered all antiliberal violence to be war — or its synonym, tyranny. The era of tyrannies marked the end of the age of revolutions. The difference between revolution and war had to do with the type of government they attacked: if the government was authoritarian, the attack was a revolution; it the government was liberal, the attack was a war.

Hence, it followed — 'because it is impossible for tyrannical governments constantly to prepare their populations for war without

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22 E. Halévy, *L'ère des tyrannies*, Paris 1939, p. 214. On how the *Collège* reacted to Halévy's thesis see Hollier, *College* (above, note 8), pp. 153 and 347–350.

waging war' — that there was no prospect more threatening to tyranny than peace. Conversely, for democracies, war was not a threat but a death warrant:

> If war breaks out again, and if democracies, in order to preserve themselves from destruction, are condemned to adopt totalitarian systems, will there not be a generalization of tyranny, a reinforcement and propagation of this form of government?[23]

For Halévy, a pacified tyranny was a contradiction in terms, just like a democracy at war.

Thus, war — implying as it does the downfall of democracy whether the outcome is victory or defeat — confronts democracy with a dilemma. In the case of defeat, democracy disappears because it was insufficiently militarized. In the case of victory, it acquires a taste for war and turns into a military regime, having co-opted its internal opponents in order to defend itself against its external enemies. The French army is just as much of a threat to French democracy as the German army. As Halévy put it,

> If war breaks out, democratic countries will find themselves in a tragic situation. Can they go on being liberal parliamentary democracies if they wish to wage war effectively? My thesis is that they cannot.[24]

This was also Malraux's opinion, but for opposite reasons.

Julien Benda's name does not appear on the list of those who took part in the discussion following Halévy's lecture. Yet the book Benda was writing when war broke out, *La grande épreuve des démocraties* (The great challenge to democracies), reads like a dialogue with the ideas expressed in 'The Era of Tyrannies.' *La grande épreuve*, written in France and in French just before the war, was not published until 1942 — in French, but outside of France. By the time the Editions de la Maison Franchaise published his book in New York, Benda was in hiding in Carcassone. It was the very challenge to the democracies, among other things, that made it impossible for him to publish *La grande épreuve* on French territory.

Nevertheless, Benda's views are less pessimistic than Halévy's. Like the latter, Benda considers war and democracy mutually contradictory.

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23 Halévy, *L'ère*, p. 225
24 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

But whereas for Halévy that contradiction could only be fatal to democracy, for Benda — more Kantian here than ever (the book was dedicated to Kant) — democracy must and therefore has the ability to surmount the contradiction. Thus, while Halévy's turning point came in August 1914, when the state of siege in Europe seemed irreversible, Benda's came with the 1918 Armistice, the 'farewell to arms' whereby peace had authorized a return to democracy. Democracy had triumphed not only because it had vanquished Prussian imperialism on the foreign front, but also because, on the domestic front, it had put and end to the unlimited powers of Poincaré.

Let me quote the very first line of lines of the book:

> The great challenge to democracies which find themselves in need of defending their existence against a military type of government can be summed up in one word. These governments are in a state of initial inferiority because their principles are adapted to the state of peace, which is only natural since they consider peace a moral value and the state of peace the normal state of humanity; whereas the adversary's doctrines are strictly and exclusively adapted for war, which he declares to be the noblest form of human life and the natural state of the species. Given this fact, democracies will need to prove — on pain of death — that in the face of danger they are capable of applying such restrictions to their principles as might be required by the state of war and the will to preserve their existence. Such is the challenge.[25]

Benda's purpose here is twofold. He is attacking militarism, which makes war a value in and of itself, but he is also attacking pacifism for its erroneous conception of the relationship between democracy and war. Democracy must oppose war, but not exclude it. The crucial distinction here is that between fact and value, between making war and relishing it. War, in other words, is indeed the antithesis of democracy — but a democracy that wishes to survive must be capable of embracing, and containing, its antithesis. It must be capable of setting itself aside, suspending itself, withholding itself. Democracy must be capable of war, even if war is incapable of democracy. It is thus essential that the political platform of liberalism should include a clause for its own suspension, albeit temporary — a situation in which individual liberties are withdrawn, civil guarantees suspended, and the private sphere reduced to a minimum.

25 J. Benda, *La grande épreuve des démocraties*, New York 1942.

In the period when he was writing *La grande épreuve des démocraties*, Benda regularly attended the meetings of the Collège de Sociologies. The influence of these discussions — to which the book alludes directly (ranging Bataille and Caillois on the side of the enemies of democracy) — is perceptible in Benda's dialectical treatment of the contradiction between war and democracy, a treatment reminiscent of both Caillois's theory of festivals and Bataille's theory of transgression.[26] Bataille, in a lecture at the Collège, described the army as the *part maudite* (the accursed element) in a democratic society — a group which, 'in relation to society as a whole, appears to be something *completely other*, a foreign body.'[27] It is out of sheer hypocrisy, he added, that the army pretends to fulfill a social function and aspire to something other than its own glory. Similarly, in Caillois's view, the Carnival is the period when society overturns its own fundamental laws, making their transgression compulsory.[28] Benda's opinion follows the same lines: war never ceases being taboo in a democracy, but there are circumstances in which that taboo must be violated.[29]

26 On Benda's presence at the Collège see Hollier, *College* (above, note 8), pp. 189–195 and 379–380. Benda refers to these discussions in *La grande épreuve*, pp. 190–191. See also the marginalia added to the latest French edition of *Le Collège*, 1995.
27 G. Bataille, 'The structure and Function of the Army,' in Hollier, *College* (above, note 8), p. 144.
28 R. Caillois, 'Festival,' *ibid.*, pp. 281–303.
29 For a further development of this subject, see the chapter 'Desperanto' in my forthcoming book, *The Dispossessed*, to be published by Harvard University Press.

Pierre Birnbaum

Catholic Identity, Universal Suffrage and 'Doctrines of Hatred'

From the French Revolution to Vichy, the history of modern France may be regarded as a conflict between the forces favourable to political democracy and those which opposed it, with the latter preferring the concept of the organic identity of the social body to that of a 'general will' expressed through universal suffrage. In their various forms, the antidemocratic currents each time invoked the idea of the permanence of a communal solidarity, and repudiated the principle of a rationalism inherent to human nature, associated with the Age of Enlightenment and legitimizing the principle of 'one man, one vote.' In this respect, the Vichy regime negated the French Revolution, but even more so the Third Republic, which realized the institutionalization of universal suffrage, although this was still limited to men only. Waiving the principle of the political equality of all men by virtue of their citizenship, the Vichy government represented a return to the Ancien Regime, which derived its coherence from an amalgamation of the Catholic religion and the State and from a system of guilds which was meant to provide a functional representation of all social groupings.

If the 'Franco-French wars' reached their climax during the Third Republic and never again until our own time attained such an intensity, it was because, during the period from 1870 to 1940, certain struggles took place whose outcome is regarded as definitive: that for universal suffrage and on behalf of a citizenry more triumphant than it had ever been since the French Revolution, but also those for secularism and the separation of Church and State, for state education and for rationalist positivism. There appeared to be a clear opposition between, on the one hand, the Catholic Church and the supporters of a right which was still often monarchistic and which always rejected the principle of popular sovereignty, and, on the other hand, all those who could conceive of French society only in terms of a citizenship which necessarily implied secularism. The triumph of the Republic was thus extremely fragile: it

happened less than a century ago and involved a number of ambiguities which I would like to examine here.[1]

It would seem that sufficient attention has never been drawn to the fact that the period when the ideological battles which created modern France were fought out was also the one when the 'doctrines of hatred' such as anti-Protestantism and antisemitism — which were by far the most violent and intense — came into being. Over and above the political struggles which took place during the Dreyfus Affair and at the time of the Popular Front, over and above the social struggles, the strikes and the financial scandals, I wish to demonstrate that the most symbolic and decisive aspect of these Franco-French wars is to be found elsewhere, in the legitimation of universal suffrage and with it an egalitarian individualism that was the very essence of the Republic. This individualism was utterly subversive of the old monarchical order of a Catholic France which was now divested of any essence of its own. It was felt that such a blow to its identity could only be the work of Satan himself through the agency of his allies on earth, the Jews and the Protestants, both of whom propagated individualistic doctrines destructive of the Catholic community.

Already at the beginning of the nineteenth century, de Bonald, for instance, had declared individualism to be reponsible for the decadence of France because it disintegrated the social fabric and undermined its unity, destroyed the family, encouraged the growth of the State which was detrimental to the life of the provinces, nurtured educational principles contrary to the tenets of Catholicism, and finally led inevitably to an acceptance of divorce, which Abbé Barruel, in his *Letters on Divorce* (1790), had already said to be principle par excellence of the dissolution of the social order. For Abbé Barruel, as for de Maistre and de Bonald, the arrival of the Republic meant the definitive triumph of decadence, as they felt that victorious liberalism and the representative order struck at the very roots of Catholic France.[2] Thus, if the counterrevolutionary right did not inevitably lead to the contemporary Fascist movements (it rejected their plebeian aspect, hardly compatible with the idea of the supremacy of the religious element), if it disdained the admiration they sometimes expressed for the events of 1789,[3] it nevertheless shared with them in advance a

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1   I wish to thank Yves Deloye for leading me to some of the references I have used.
2   G. Gengembre, *La contre-révolution ou l'histoire désespérante*, Paris 1989.
3   P. Burin, "Le fascisme: la révolution sans révolutionnaires," *Le Débat*, January–March 1986. Cf., for example, Marcel Déat's *Memoires*, Paris 1989, p. 52.

rejection of individualism and universal suffrage. Moreover, despite their differences, the counterrevolutionary right and all those whom it influenced in the moderate right joined the Fascist right in accusing the Jews, and sometimes the Protestants, of being responsible for setting up this atomizing and rationalistic political regime, this 'Jewish Republic' which appeared to them to have been imposed from the outside by the forces of evil that had always sought to destroy France's Catholic identity. De Bonald declared that 'a republican France would mean the end of a monarchical Europe, and a republican Europe would mean the end of civilization, religion, politics, the end of society, the end of everything.' Like Abbé Barruel and, to a lesser extent, de Maistre, he believed that behind this accursed regime were the Jews and Protestants, spreading their disruptive individualism which led directly to an unacceptable universal suffrage.

By the 1880s, the issue had not changed: it presented itself in a form which was possibly even more dramatic, so important did a solution to the problem appear and so fateful for the destiny of French society midway between the victory of the Republic and that of Vichy. Ferdinand Brunetière expressed the matter as follows: 'Just as Protestantism is England, and Orthodoxy is Russia, so Catholicism is France. ... Anything in the world we permit to be done against Catholicism, we shall do to the detriment of our influence in the world, in opposition to our history and, finally, at the expense of those qualities which are proper to the French soul.'[4] At that period which saw the triumph of the 'absolute Republic'[5] sustained by an exacting citizenry basing itself on the principles of reason and science,[6] and deriving its legitimacy from a universal suffrage justified in the most abstract possible terms, there were many people who were totally unwilling to abandon another, more traditional source of legitimacy derived from a Catholicism deeply opposed to the identification of the citizen with the individual. For the Church of that period, there could be no valid distinction between the citizen and the believer, and no room for an autonomous public sphere distinct from the religious.

Albert de Mun was a figure in the forefront of this battle. Let us take, for example, the speech he delivered on the occasion of the fourteenth centenary of the baptism of Clovis, at the Congress of Catholic Youth in Rheims in May 1896. Celebrating 'the Christian line which emerges

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4   F. Brunetière, *Discours de combat*, Paris 1900, p. 193.
5   O. Rudelle, *La République absolue, 1870–1889*, Paris, Sorbonne 1986.
6   C. Nicolet, *L'idée républicaine en France*, Paris 1982.

from the baptistery at Rheims,' he declared that, from the earliest history of 'our race,' Clovis's call had been answered by a 'divine assistance' which decided the fate of the 'little tribe' upon the 'Gaulish soil.' 'That was it!' exclaimed de Mun. 'The die was cast. The Frankish nation had received its mission.'[7] Constantly harping on this theme, he praised the 'Christian cement' which, he said, was the only thing which held French society together, and he further claimed that to 'be a Christian not only means practicing one's religion with sanctity in one's private life,' but also working in society as a whole for the accomplishment of Christian ideals. Thus, in his opinion, no division between the public and private spheres, as was envisaged in that period by the Republic searching for a compromise with the Church, was conceivable. For him as for the proponents of an intransigent Catholicism — for de Maistre, Lamennais in his early period and Louis Veuillot, right up to the Maritain of *Antimoderne*[8] (contemptuous in his youth, like many other Catholics opposed to liberalism, of the 'three reformers': Luther, Descartes and Rousseau), and including Emmanuel Bailly, founder of *La Croix*, and certain founders of the Christian-Democratic stream at the turn of the century — any separation of the religious and the secular was intolerable, an opinion which simultaneously precluded any autonomization of the political sphere.

As has often been pointed out, this rejection of a political sphere separate from Catholicism found in de Mun, La Tour du Pin and Maurras is as much to be found among the founders of Le Sillon, who displayed a similar intransigence in this matter.[9] Robert Cornilleau, a Christian-democratic journalist and chief editor of *Le Petit démocrate* in the inter-war period, made one of the characters in his novel, *Le navire sans capitaine*, say: 'France was the first Christian nation, and it will become that again, not with the king but with the people.'[10] And Marc Sangnier, who was a founder of Le Sillon, politically at the opposite pole from the different movements of the extreme right and condemned by Rome for having expressed too openly an acceptance of popular sovereignty, nevertheless asserted in his book, *Le Sillon: Esprit et Méthodes* (1905),[11] that the democracy of his movement represented

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7 A. de Mun, *Discours et Ecrits divers*, VI, Paris 1904.
8 J. Maritain, *Antimoderne*, Paris 1922.
9 Cf. J.-M. Mayeur, 'Catholicisme intransigeant, catholicisme social, démocratie chrétienne,' *Annales*, January–March 1972.
10 Quoted by J.-M. Mayeur, *ibid.*, p. 491.
11 M. Sangnier, *Le Sillon, Esprit et Méthodes*, Paris 1905, p. 64. Cf. E. Poulat, *Eglise contre bourgeoisie*, Paris 1977, p. 150.

'one of the particular forms which Christian Democracy can take,' and strongly condemned 'corrupting liberalism.' Some historians stress the communal aspect of the internal organization of the movement founded by Sangnier, its charismatic and disciplined quality, which, despite the extreme difference of political attitudes, they compare with Action française.[12]

From one end of the political spectrum to the other, there was support for Catholicism as a principle that should triumph over democracy and a corresponding rejection of liberalism as destructive of a communal dimension deemed to be essential. There are many examples of this attitude. Addressing his 'co-religionists' in the Chamber of Deputies, Barrès warned them that 'in tearing the nation away from Catholicism, you cannot foresee how much you are tearing away of the moral forces, the exquisite feelings, the virtues that Catholicism has implanted in Franch souls.'[13] Taking this line of argument to its conclusion, Barrès declared: 'I believe that French nationhood is closely tied to Catholicism, that it has been formed and developed in a Catholic atmosphere, and that in seeking to destroy, to take away from the nation this Catholicism, so closely connected with all our ways of feeling, you cannot foresee all that you are taking away.'[14] According to this extreme view, nationality was highly dependent on adherence to Catholicism, and so all those who did not adhere to this system of belief could not claim to be French. Political democracy, it was claimed, ought therefore to be limited to Catholics, the only ones who would have the right to vote, as only they could call themselves French. Taking this argument even further, Abbé F. Julien claimed that 'to be Catholic is to belong body and soul to the universal society instituted by Jesus Christ and thus to be a citizen of the great Christian society which has its laws, its hierarchy and its supreme head.'[15] Good citizenship and Catholicism were once more inextricably interconnected, with an implicit rejection from the social body of all non-Catholics, who by definition did not have the right to be considered citizens. In the name of this 'intransigent' Catholicism, the equality of all citizens in public life was denied. The Catholic model was thus of crucial importance in the rejection of political democracy.

Thus, one sees that at the turn of the century there developed a systematic refutation of the purely rationalistic and universalistic

12 Cf. P. Cohen, 'Heroes and Dilettantes: The Action Française, Le Sillon and the Generation of 1905–1914,' *French Historical Studies*, Autumn 1988.
13 M. Barrès, *Les Mauvais instituteurs*, Paris 1907, p. 16.
14 M. Barrès, *Bulletin officiel de la Ligue de la Patrie Française*, January 1907.
15 Abbé F. Julien, *Civisme et catholicisme*, Paris 1911, BN 80 R 14946 (579).

concept of citizenship. Very logically, this also led to a general condemnation of universal suffrage, and if the argument was now presented not from a socialist point of view, as was so often the case in that period, but from a Catholic one, the terms of alienation and manipulation in which it was framed were almost identical to those used by the latter. Universal suffrage was accused not of failing to represent the true economic interests of the voters, as in the socialist interpretation, but of failing to represent their basic values — that is, their Christian identity. Thus, said Pernolet, 'under the system of universal suffrage the rashest and the most herdlike elements increasingly dissociate themselves, not only from France's traditional forms of religious worship, but also from religious sentiment and consequently from the idea of God. ... [The] minority can do anything, because the system of universal suffrage as presently constituted is so perverted that the most moderate and competent elements are left aside.'[16] The orthodox Marxist claim that the proletariat was alienated due to a false accounting of its interests, Pareto's and Mosca's theories of manipulative elites that misrepresent the issues and control the will of the masses, and the Catholic rejection of a 'general will' led astray by agitators who turn it away from its natural beliefs all reinforced one another, in times of crisis, by greatly weakening political democracy and its conception of the enlightened citizen.

From all these points of view, education was an issue of importance, in that the school was the venue of the political socialization of future generations. It was here, therefore — ran the argument — that future elections could be won, providing children were taught the truth and made into citizens conscious of their true values. The rejection of secular education must be seen in the context of this struggle, which would determine the use to which universal suffrage was to be put. Pierre Biétry said that 'for the first time, the estrangement of the father of the family coincides with the open intention of banishing God and above all the Catholic faith which is that of the majority of the French in French schools.'[17] The school, it was maintained, had the task of transmitting to the future voters the values of the 'majority of the French,' so that they would remain true, even in the polling-booth, to their Catholic values, thus counteracting the 'defective' structure of this very misleading form of national representation. Accordingly, there were many people who urged that the fact of a Catholic majority should

16 Pernolet, *Dieu et la République*, Paris 1883, BN 80 R 5106.
17 P. Biétry, *La séparation des Ecoles et de l'Etat*, Paris n.d., p. 16.

be taken into account and who hoped that a system of 'proportional representation' would be instituted in the schools with regard to the distribution of budgets and educational advantages. The system of proportional representation in Parliament would thus be paralleled by a similar arrangement with regard to schools — both of them assuring, in this new interpretation of democracy by which citizens were categorized according to their religions, an automatic majority to the Catholic population, on condition that the latter performed its 'civic duties' in a suitable manner.[18]

In this period, as the republicans gradually imposed a secularization of the school system and disseminated manuals of civic instruction extolling reason and encouraging the body of the citizens to orient itself towards universalism, with a consequent detachment from various local and also religious interests,[19] the attendant educational controversy had immediate implications for the role of universal suffrage. In the opinion of the defenders of Catholic identity, the result of the vote ought to conform with the religion of the majority — but for this the voters had to gain a consciousness of their true identity. As Abbé Charles Calippe observed: 'In a land which consecrates the sovereignty of numbers, one has only one weapon against numbers,' Catholic education, which thus appeared to be the only force that could bring the development of democracy to its proper conclusion. He added: 'Catholicism cannot satisfy the most intimate and most noble aspirations of the human soul without becoming the most valuable helper of democracy.'[20]

In view of the 'law of numbers' implied by the coming of democracy and the reign of the 'masses' described at length by the Catholic philosopher Ortega y Casset, for example; in view of the supposed irrationalism of crowds described in the same period by Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde, according to whom 'suggestion' and 'imitation' cause masses to indulge in an emotional behaviour disregardful of reason and unfavourable to a respect for traditional values and, in particular, for Catholic dogma, universal suffrage itself presented a problem. Gabriel Tarde, the famous writer of *Les Lois de l'imitation*, declared his dislike of its application to political questions because he

18 E. Duthoit, *Pages catholiques sociales*, Paris 1901.
19 Cf. Y. Deloye, *La citoyenneté au miroir de l'école républicaine et de ses contestations. Politique et religion dans la France du 19e siècle*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Paris I, 1991.
20 Abbé C. Calippe, *L'éducation chrétienne de la démocratie*, Paris 1899, pp. 3, 19, and 50.

was distrustful of a public opinion which seemed to him a phenomenon of collective psychology.[21] At the same time, as we have pointed out, this principle of numbers was also condemned by part of the Marxist tradition, which accused it of favouring the tendency of isolated individuals unaware of their true class interests to vote for the right. These two internally opposed points of view were at any rate united in their denial of the voters' capacity to decide their political future rationally.

Just as the Marxist Jules Guesde deplored all the manipulations made possible by the practice of universal suffrage, so, among the Catholics, Father Joseph Burnichon fulminated against the idea of 'accustoming the ordinary citizen to forgo religion,' and was likewise of the opinion that 'power belongs to whoever is able to exploit the people' through a shamelss manipulation of universal suffrage, distorted by those who, knowing how to 'flatter,' succeed in making the voters forget their Catholic identity, exactly as the Marxists claimed that the bourgeoisie succeeded in making the proletarian voters forget their class-consciousness.

The Marxist left often described universal suffrage as an atomizing factor. Gramsci, for example, like Marx himself, waxed nostalgic about the group spirit, the atmosphere of communion of the *Gemeinschaft*. The labour movement, he said, 'is the reaction of a society which wishes to remodel itself as an integrated, harmonious organism governed by love and compassion. The "citizen" is disavowed by the "comrade," and social atomism is repudiated by the organization,'[22] leading to the creation of integrative syndical or political structures. Similarly, those who wished to preserve the Catholic identity betrayed by popular suffrage proposed counterbalancing its effects by the creation of associations which could maintain collective Catholic traditions. In this connection, we should examine an astonishing text by Abbé E. Julien: 'It is futile,' he said, 'for an individualistic democrat to count the millions of votes involved in a popular ballot: it can be regarded as a number of zeros preceded by a single positive figure. The voters are the zeros and the government is the positive figure, so that there

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21 G. Tarde, 'Le suffrage dit universel,' in *Etudes pénales et sociales*, Paris 1892. On Tarde cf. I. Lubek, 'Histoires de psychologies sociales perdues, le cas de Gabriel Tarde,' *Revue Française de sociologie*, July–September 1981, and D. Reyniè, 'Gabriel Tarde, théoreticien de l'opinion,' in G. Tarde, *L'opinion et la foule*, Paris 1989.

22 Cf. P. Birnbaum, 'Suffrage universel, parti-guide et mobilisation,' in *Dimensions du pouvoir*, Paris 1984, p 96ff.

is no middle ground between absolutism and anarchy. There again, association is the remedy.'[23]

It can be said that just as Marxist thought rejected the principle of individualism on which universal suffrage was founded, so, too, did those who supported the Catholic model condemn it for falsifying the values of the majority of Frenchmen. Before briefly examining the solutions which the Catholic theoreticians proposed for changing universal suffrage into something which represented the situation more faithfully, let us first look at their analyses of the foundations of this quasi-satanic individualism that was so destructive of the collective values of Catholic France. According to them, its propagators were indubitably the Protestants and the Jews. These were the objects of the 'doctrines of hatred' (to use the famous expression of Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu),[24] which constantly stigmatized them as the source of the modern sickness that was undermining the Catholic societies by harming the communal structures that guaranteed the transmission of their indigenous culture.

Let us return to Ferdinand Brunetière, whom we have already mentioned in connection with his attachment to the idea of France as a purely Catholic entity. According to him, the 'excess of individualism' which was undermining France derived directly from the Reformation and was giving rise to a new paganism.[25] Similarly, Charles Benoist, a future monarchist who was to join Action française, and who was attached to the idea that Catholic France was being destroyed by the modern State, said, pointing an accusing finger at the Protestants: 'The great evil and the great danger is molecular "national sovereignty": it is the inorganic universal suffrage which can only be an anarchic universal suffrage.'[26] From de Maistre to Maurras, from the French Revolution to the Third Republic and Vichy, the Protestants and the Jews were always singled out as being responsible for the flowering of individualism reflected in the abhorred universal suffrage. There are many examples: de Mun saw the rationalism of the Reformation, transmitted through the writings of Rousseau and the works of German philosophers like Kant, as the triumph of an absolute individualism,

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23 Abbé E. Julien, *Le conflit*, Paris 1904, p. 359.
24 A. Leroy-Beaulieu, *Les doctrines de haine: L'antisémitisme, L'antiprotestantisme, L'anticléricalisme*, Paris 1902.
25 F. Brunetière, *Discours de combat*, Paris 1907, p. 101.
26 C. Benoist, *La crise de l'Etat moderne: De l'organisation du suffrage universal*, Paris 1895, p. 29.

and, claiming the authority of Taine and Le Play, he pleaded in favour of an organic Christian community attached to the 'soil.' Consistently with his argument, he finally declared 'Parliamentarianism is the enemy!' — thus turning around Gambetta's hated formula, 'Clericalism is the enemy!'[27] The Catholic monarchist right clearly proclaimed its objectives: to turn the clock back to before the events of 1789, which had been caused by the machinations of Protestants, Jews and Freemasons who had deliberately propagated a destructive individualism. This was to be done with the purpose of reconstituting a society of order and hierarchy incompatible with universal suffrage.

Continuing the populist view of Drumont, who regarded the Protestants as tainted with the Old Testament and Jewish individualism, Charles Maurras reflected on this Catholic rejection of individualistic political democracy, perceived as the formal framework for the hidden rule of the 'four confederated estates': the Protestants, the Jews, the Freemasons and the foreigners. One had, he said, 'to look for something other than democracy. ... for a better organization of universal suffrage.'[28] A king, for example, derives his legitimacy from heredity and not from election. 'Democracy,' said Maurras, 'is nothing but the idolatry of the individual counted as a single person, counted inasmuch as he is an individual. ... In order to emancipate the individual from professional discipline, they destroyed the guilds; in order to emancipate the individual, they made war against Catholicism.'[29]

Antisemitism and anti-Protestantism culminated at the turn of the century. Protestants and Jews, associated with the secular Third Republic by virtue of the involvement of several of their number in the implementation of its policies and so also in the separation of Church and State, became the very symbol of an artificial regime imposed by the forces of Evil. Re-creating the atmosphere of the St. Bartholomew's night massacres of the Huguenots, which they would have liked to repeat, the anti-Protestant polemicists rejected this Republic which, as in the sixteenth century, 'was strangling France.' There was a call for a new Richelieu to rise up and fight against this Protestant and Jewish

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27 A. de Mun, *Discours*, Paris 1904, VII, pp. 53, 56 and 58, and IV, p. 146.
28 C. Maurras, *Enquête sur la Monarchie*, and see also idem, *Pour en sortir. Ce qu'il faut à la France*, Paris 1925. On Maurras and Drumont see M. Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890–1914*, Cambridge 1982, Chap. 1. On Maurras's hostility towards the Protestants see V. Nguyen, 'L'Action française devant la Réforme,' in P. Joutard (ed.), *Historiographie de la Réforme*, Paris 1977.
29 C. Maurras, *Dictionnaire politique et critique*, Paris 1932, p. 307.

republic, this 'state within a state' which differentiated itself from Catholic society and provided itself with its own space, and which on behalf of foreign Internationals constantly betrayed the eternal Catholic soul of the nation.[30] Jews and Protestants merged in a single republican entity whose individualistic character, shaped by the ideas of the Talmud and the Reformation, disintegrated the organic Catholic community by means both of secularism and of universal suffrage, with its purely abstract concept of citizenship. Drumont, Taxil, Thiebaud, Renaudel and a host of other Catholic polemicists all brandished the same accusation: the Republic was really a purely Protestant and Jewish regime. They had noticed the involvement of an appreciable number of Protestants and Jews in the opportunistic circles around Gambetta and then Jules Ferry, in the defence of republican institutions, in the promotion of universal suffrage and in the composition of manuals of civic instruction aimed at legitimizing a universalistic conception of citizenship. As a result, the Republic, in their eyes, was quite simply assimilated to the 'Monod State,' to use Maurras's expression, or, again, to the 'Jewish Republic.'[31]

The Catholic opposition and the antiparliamentarians were united in their rejection of the individualism said to have been introduced into France by the cosmopolitan Protestant and Jewish forces. Far from necessarily implying a return to monarchy, as with de Mun, Charles Benoist or Charles Maurras, these values also formed the basis of an authoritarian nationalism embodied both by Deroulède and Barrès and by certain currents of the 'revolutionary right.' This school of thought claimed to continue the Jacobin tradition, and it was also socialist in the Proudhonian sense, anticapitalistic, hostile to political liberalism and universal suffrage, antagonistic to the Jews and totally committed to the Catholic identity of French society. Like Drumont, it accepted this time the republican framework in principle, but nevertheless condemned the

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30 Cf. J. Bauberot, 'La vision de la Réforme chez les publicistes antiprotestants (fin 19è–debut 20è),' in P. Joutard (ed.), *Historiographie de la Réforme*, Paris 1977.

31 On the role of Protestants in the building up of the Republic, cf. S. Schram, *Protestantism and Politics in France*, Alençon 1954; A. Encrévé & M. Richard (eds.), *Les protestants dans les débuts de la IIIè République*, Paris 1979. On political anti-Protestantism see J. Biberot, 'L'antiprotestantisme à la fin du XIXè siècle,' *Revue d'Histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, 1972, No. 4, and 1973, No. 2; S. Hause, 'Anti-Protestant Rhetoric in the Early Third Republic,' *French Historical Studies*, Spring 1989. On the presence of Jews in the republican administration see P. Birnbaum, 'L'entrée en République: Le personnel politique juif sous la IIIè République,' in *Idéologies, parties politiques et groupes sociaux*, Paris 1989. On political antisemitism see idem, *Antisemitism in France — From Léon Blum to Pierre Mendes-France*, Oxford 1992.

electoral process financed by the manipulating and alienating 'Jewish gold,' in this resembling a reductionist Marxism. Concerned, unlike Maurras, with the problem of the integration of the proletariat into the national collectivity, Barrès displayed an anticapitalist antisemitism shared by certain currents of the socialist left influenced by Proudhon and Toussenel.[32] Simultaneously a bitter enemy of parliamentarianism and liberal democracy and an opponent of the royalism of Action française, Barrès accepted the French Revolution so abhorred by the Catholic conservatives. On this ideological basis, he initiated a 'national socialism' expressive of ebullient French vitality, whose violent hostility to Protestants and Jews was based on a Catholicism which the French were supposed to have in their 'blood.' As Zeev Sternhell has pointed out, 'Barrès was Catholic because he was French, and he defended the Church because a non-Catholic France would no longer be France.'[33]

The exasperation of the various counterrevolutionary Catholic right-wing movements and of all those whom they influenced in the most varied Catholic schools of thought reached its climax in 1889 with the celebration of the centenary of the events of 1789. On every side, pamphlets appeared condemning the parliamentarianism that was so destructive of the 'Christian constitution of France.'[34] Let us finally return to this Catholic concept which, beyond the diversity of political attitudes, seemed each time it arose to imply a more-or-less definite rejection of political democracy. For instance, we should note how numerous, shortly before the First World War and during the inter-war period, were the Catholics who condemned the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which established the principle of the equality of all citizens, and, by extension, was the source-text in France of universal suffrage. Quite apart from the adherents of the monarchist or nationalist right, the Catholic world itself seemed quite cool towards this declaration which ignored the Catholic identity of France for the benefit of a purely individualistic point of view. Many bishops (including Cardinal Liénart of Lille), but also Emmanuel Mounier, felt this source-text to be full of the 'liberal individualism' which remained the 'radical evil.'[35] In a more general way, one could agree with Émile Poulat that 'Christian democracy in these beginnings

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32 Z. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, Brussels 1985.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 309.
34 P. Pierrard, *L'Eglise et la Révolution, 1789–1889*, Paris 1988, p. 236.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

owed nothing to and asked nothing of the democracy which arose out of 1789. It was its antithesis and its alternative.'[36]

We must therefore consider the almost total incomprehension that existed between those whose sole allegiance was to France's Catholic identity and those who, on the contrary, wished to create a republic of rationalistic citizens. We are not suggesting — which would be absurd — that those who upheld the fundamentally Catholic identity of French society automatically supported the doctrines of hatred or, through the ambivalence of some of the positions they adopted, paved the way for a French form of Fascism. This was clearly not the case, since a number of them turned towards the left and displayed a remarkable tolerance towards other confessions. The point we wish to stress is not their relationship with the movements of the extreme right but rather their attitude to the democracy stemming from the French Revolution, which was often rejected by Catholics of both right and left, since both condemned its supposedly individualistic foundations. This being so, there is little reason, for example, to pursue the debate over the significance of Emmanuel Mounier's slogan, 'neither left nor right,' within the context of the gathering strength of the extreme right,[37] but we should simply see in the adoption of this position, as in many similar cases, a clear example of the attitude of hostility towards democracy of a Catholicism that still rejected both the perceived individualism of this type of regime and its conception of citizenship based on reason rather than on faith.[38]

Let us return to the case of the philosopher Jacques Maritain, a youthful convert to Catholicism who influenced every Catholic thinker between the two World Wars. For most of his life, Maritain totally rejected the doctrines of hatred; he fought them, protested against the Nazi persecution of the Jews, combated 'impossible antisemitism'[39] and was as opposed to Francoism as he was to the Vichy regime. Nevertheless, he was always more than reserved both towards the

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36 E. Poulat, *Eglise contre bourgeoisie* (above, note 11), p. 155. In this connection, see also H. Rollet, *L'Action sociale des catholiques en France (1800–1914)*, Paris 1958, and more recently P. Portier, 'La philosophie politique de l'Eglise catholique: changement ou permanence?' *Revue Française de science politique*, June 1986.

37 Cf. Z. Sternhell, *Ni droite, ni gauche: L'idéologie fasciste en France*, Paris 1983, p. 301.

38 In this connection, see P. Cohen, *Piety and Politics: Catholic Revival and the Generation of 1905–1914 in France*, New York 1987, pp. 313ff., which also notes the relationship between Catholicism and hostility towards democracy, and thus suggests that the principle of 'neither right nor left' does not necessarily have to do only with Fascism.

39 J. Maritain, 'L'impossible antisémitisme,' in *Les Juifs*, Paris 1937.

French Revolution and towards political democracy.[40] Let us examine, for example, his *Charles Maurras et le devoir des catholiques*, published in 1926. Over and above the differences between Maurras and himself, he said, one should 'recognize what is true in Maurras, that which links him to the thought of de Maistre and Bossuet.'[41] According to Maritain, Maurras wished to 'serve and devote himself to the wellbeing of society in distress,' and, like him, Maritain condemned 'democratism, the religious myth of democracy which merges into the dogma of the Sovereign People.' Like Joseph de Maistre, to whom he referred, he regarded the French Revolution as 'satanic' and congratulated Maurras on having 'cleansed the intelligence and rescued it from the false liberal doctrines.' 'Why,' he asked, 'did the Catholics let someone else do the work which was incumbent on them?'[42]

Over and above his rejection of the French Revolution and the myth of a political revolution divested of all Catholic content, Maritain attacked Rousseau, that 'tremendous perverter,'[43] the creator of a political pantheism — that of a general will, an 'immanent social God' acting through 'the majority of suffrages.' 'This,' said Maritain, 'is the special myth, the spiritual principle of modern democracy, entirely opposed to the Christian concept, which is that sovereignty derives from God.'[44] For Maritain, 'the myth of democracy as the sole legitimate sovereign, the spiritual principle of modern egalitarianism' was 'indisputably an outrageous absurdity.'[45] And, over and above his condemnation of Rousseau, like the majority of the conservative current before him, Maritain pointed an accusing finger at Protestantism, which he claimed was destructive of the 'basically anti-individualistic Christian society.'[46] Reflecting later on, in 1942, on the failure of the democracies in the face of Nazi barbarism, Maritain was of the opinion that 'the principal cause of their failure is spiritual and is to be found in the internal contradiction and tragic misunderstanding of which the modern democracies, especially in Europe, have been the victims. In essence, this form and ideal of common life known as democracy is of evangelical inspiration, and cannot exist without the Gospels.

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40 Cf. C. Blanchet, 'Autonomie de la culture et espérance temporelle selon Jacques Maritain entre 1930 et 1940,' in *Les catholiques français et l'héritage de 1789*, Paris 1989.
41 J. Maritain, *Charles Maurras et le devoir des catholiques*, Paris 1926, p. 13.
42 *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 36–37.
43 J. Maritain, *Trois réformateurs: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau*, Paris 1925, p. 169.
44 *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 196.
45 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
46 *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 72, 134.

For more than a century we have seen the leading forces of the modern democracies deny the Gospel and Christianity in the name of human liberty, and for more than a century we have seen the Christian strata of society oppose democratic aspirations in the name of religion.'[47] Unceasingly condemnatory of the Vichy regime and the persecution of the Jews, hostile to the regime in which a significant part of the French Church had long recognized its own image, Maritain nevertheless believed that in order to resolve this crisis of civilization it was necessary to remember that 'democracy is linked to Christianity, and democracy arose in human history as a temporal manifestation of the evangelical spirit.' Faced with the 'pagan empire,' the democracies, he said, could therefore find salvation only in a return to 'the message of the Gospels.'[48]

One can see here that although Jacques Maritain had long been close to Action française, he was now entirely opposed to the movements of the radical right, but at the same time remained deeply critical of political democracy inasmuch as it was based on individualism and ignored the evangelistic message. Maritain had a strong influence on Emmanuel Mounier and played an important part in the creation of the review *Esprit*.[49] Mounier, its editor, was often very critical of the French Revolution and close in certain respects to Action française; as he wrote in the journal *Action française*: 'We fought bravely against liberal and parliamentary democracy and in favour of a traditionalistic conformism.'[50] He stated openly that 'the ideology we are opposing is the ideology of '89 ... an attachment to an abstract and mendacious parliamentarianism which, moreover, is every day less highly regarded. This democracy is as ignorant of the original and whole person as it is of the organic community which should bind the persons together.'[51] Here again one finds the model of an organic Catholic community expressing the essence of French society, formulated this time by a writer of the left and not by those of the extreme right, in order to justify the rejection of an abstract and individualistic democracy. As noted by Etienne Borne, a writer who participated in the collective project represented by *Esprit*, 'Emmanuel Mounier did not readily use the word democracy. ... Democracy seemed to him close, in its

47 J. Maritain, *Christianisme et démocratie*, Paris 1945, p. 25.
48 *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 38.
49 Cf. J. Petit, Introduction to *Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, 1929–1939*, Paris 1973.
50 *Esprit*, October 1936.
51 Quoted in J.-L. Loubet de Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30*, Paris 1969, p. 210.

institutions and spirit, to a liberal and individualistic world condemned by Providence and history.'[52] This attitude represented a considerable threat to political democracy. In 1934 Mounier unhesitatingly gave the order: 'With regard to immediate action: abstention towards the political parties,'[53] thus contesting the very principle of pluralistic democracy and striking a blow at its legitimacy at a particularly precarious moment of its existence, as it was threatened on every side by movements of the extreme left and right.

Having long been close to *Ordre Nouveau* and having, like that journal, attacked the 'parliamentary filth,' Mounier separated himself from the journal in January 1934, criticizing Hitler severely. A few months later, in a famous text, he abandoned the formula 'neither right nor left,' opting this time for the left but simultaneously regarding it necessary to 'sweep away the enormous and sickening corruption of the left and a whole bazaar of trashy ideas.'[54] Over and above Mounier's ambivalent attitudes toward Nazism and Fascism, his passing admiration for their communal aspect and his ready appreciation of their rediscovery of the revolutionary spirit, and despite his later enlistment, with the staff of *Esprit*, in the camps hostile to these quasi-totalitarian regimes, what is noteworthy here is a fairly consistent rejection of democracy.[55] This attitude, which he shared with Maurras and Henri Massis, for example, becomes even more significant if one notes that a number of those who participated in the creation of *Esprit* were close to Action française, like Jean Lacroix, and some, like Maurice de Gandillac or Jacques Madaule, even played important roles there. Pierre-Henri Simon, for his part, was an important figure in the Jeunesses Patriotes.[56] What is particularly striking is the rejection of the 'parliamentary virus,' expressed in terms identical to those of the counterrevolutionary tradition derived from de Maistre and de Bonald and continued by de Mun and Maurras — all theoreticians who justified this rejection on the grounds of the common attachment to an organic France of Catholic identity that supposedly was destroyed by democratic individualism and its image, universal suffrage. Attached one and all to Catholic integralism, these thinkers questioned the legitimacy of the universalist aspect of democracy.[57]

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52 *Ibid.*, p. 209.
53 *Esprit*, March 1934.
54 *Esprit*, April 1934.
55 J. Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left, 1930–1950*, Toronto 1981, Chaps. 6 and 7.
56 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 62, 97.
57 Y. Tranvouez, *Catholiques d'abord: Approches du mouvement catholique en France, 19è–20è siècle*, Paris 1988.

Beyond the diversity of their political opinions, a great many Catholics until about the middle of the twentieth century cast doubt both on the revolutionary process and on the parliamentary republic which was its political reflection.[58]

A great many writers in this period claimed that citizenship itself was inconceivable outside of Catholic identity. 'Who is the perfect citizen?' asked the Abbé de Foy in 1912, and he answered: 'the Christian submissive to the Church.'[59] Similarly, E. Julien said that 'to be Catholic means to belong body and soul to the new society instituted by Jesus Christ under the name of the Church, and it is thus to be a citizen of the great Christian society which has its laws, its hierarchy and its supreme head.'[60] He added: 'Where have we got to if it becomes necessary for a French citizen to excuse himself in some way for believing in God?'[61] For many people, the 'de-Christianization of France' had as an inevitable consequence the 'de-nationalization of the French.'[62] That was why, for this school of thought, both citizenship and nationality were regarded as inextricably connected with the Catholic faith. Judicially, they were considered the source of the right to vote, since they determined the quality of the voters and, at the same time, the conditions of eligibility — or, in other words, the very foundations of political democracy. Logically — although this conclusion was not explicitly stated — it followed that suffrage could no longer be universal since it depended on the Catholic faith, and the voter could no longer vote in isolation, for his values connected him with an organic community of believers.

Many people felt that in order to counter the individualistic character of democracy and to eliminate the influence of Lutheran thought, a change had to be made in the universal suffrage that desegregated society. It was therefore considered necessary that 'the universal suffrage of honest men and men who think should be strong enough to override the universal suffrage which votes and decides on everything, so as to rid Parliament, the ministries, the administration, the municipal councils, everywhere of the mass of freethinkers'[63] influenced by

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58 Cf. L. Lagree, 'Exilés dans leur patrie, 1880–1920,' in F. Lebrun (ed.), *Histoire des catholiques en France*, Paris 1985; J. Le Goff Rémond, Preface to *Histoire de la France religieuse*, Paris 1988.

59 Abbé H. de Foy, *Le Citoyen*, Paris 1912, p. 5.

60 E. Julien, *Civisme et démocratie*, Paris 1911, p. 6.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

62 G. Valois & F. Renié, *Les manuels scolaires*, Paris 1911, p. 7.

63 R.P. Lescoeur, *Le dogme de la vie future et la libre-pensée contemporaine*, Paris 1892, p. 202.

the Protestants, Jews and Freemasons. There was also a tendency to favour corporatist solutions which would allow the various interests of Catholic society to be represented.[64] 'Christian democracy' was thus no longer to depend on an atomizing universal suffrage: its final purpose was to be the image of a communal social order in which different interests worked together for the common good. Thus, it was constantly proposed that a plural vote should be given to the fathers of families — a reform which was openly acknowledged to be 'antidemocratic,' but which aimed at 'making the exercise of universal suffrage more moral' by increasing the influence of Catholicism, which, it was believed, was traditionally exerted through families,[65] 'the Christian family being the cornerstone of the old national edifice.'[66]

As an alternative to the concept of 'the citizen as an isolated individual, an abstract being,' systems of corporative voting were envisaged, inspired by those of the Ancien Regime.[67] The conception of suffrage proposed was that of an adequate representation of professional groups, without any individualistic dimension — a conception whose origins went back to the most ancient traditions of Catholic France.[68] This return to a corporatist form of representation, in opposition to the principles upon which universal suffrage was founded, appeared as a logical consequence of all the theories opposed to a form of election regarded as too individualistic and, at the same time, alien to the Catholic nature of French society. It finally came to pass with the accession to power of the Vichy regime.

The Vichy regime not only redefined the conditions for citizenship and nationality but also terminated universal suffrage, preferring a corporatist form of representation justified in terms of a traditional Catholic France. Vichy also represented an attempt to renege on secularism and on state education, which had produced citizens detached from Catholicism. Finally, it constituted a union — very strong at first — between the Church and the political authorities: it was believed that the country could only be saved by a re-Christianization.[69]

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64 See for instance G. Torriola, *La notion chrétienne de la démocratie*, Paris 1897.

65 See E. Duthoit, *Vote secret, vote obligatoire, vote plural*, extract from the *Revue de Lille*, January 1898.

66 G. Noblemaire, *Le complot contre la famille*, Paris 1908, p. 67.

67 J.-P. Lafitte, *Le paradoxe de l'égalité et la répresentation proportionelle*, Paris 1910.

68 E. Duthoit, *Le suffrage de demain*, Paris 1901.

69 Jacques Duquesne, in his book, *Les catholiques français sous l'occupation* (Paris 1966), is quite severe in his judgement of the Catholic hierarchy under Vichy. See also *Eglises et Chrétiens dans la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, la France*, Lyon 1982, and P. Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy*, Paris 1990, pp. 169ff.

Maurras's extreme, phantasmogorical and scurrilous antisemitism and anti-Protestantism advanced in the name of a defence of the primacy of the Catholic identity, culminated in the hatred of individualistic democracy. Here lies the explanation for the 'divine surprise' of Vichy, an authoritarian regime opposed to individualism which, with a stroke of the pen, abolished both universal suffrage and secularism, and also excluded Jews from the State. The regained unity of the Church and State had the consequence, despite the misgivings of some, of asserting the primacy of Catholic identity, the end of individualism, the invalidity of political democracy and the triumph of an antisemitism which rescinded the French nationality of Jews, whose history and culture, according to the supporters of the new regime, amply demonstrated that they could not be integrated into the organic Catholic community reconstituted after the demise of the 'Jewish Republic.'[70] France wanted to be Catholic once more and to rectify its transgressions, 'expiate' its sins and return to its faith and its pilgrimages.[71] The end of the Republic and of representative democracy temporarily made possible a return to a pre-revolutionary France which made its Catholic faith almost the sole criterion of its legitimacy.

70 See in this connection W. Halls, *Les jeunes et la politique de Vichy*, Paris 1988; Birnbaum, *Antisemitism in France* (above, note 31); and C. Faure, *Le projet culturel de Vichy*, Lyon 1989.

71 Cf. Gervereau & D. Peschanski, *La propagande sous Vichy, 1940–1944*, Paris 1990. In many of the texts published in this collective work, the strong Catholic influence in the media and the youth movements is evident. It is equally true, however, that the Church and the Catholics also opposed Vichy. See for example H. de Lubac, *Résistance chrétienne a l'antisémitisme*, Paris 1987.

John Hellman

From the Söhlbergkreis to Vichy's Elite Schools: The Rise of the Personalists[*]

One of the most important but least studied[1] modern movements of revolt against liberal democracy was that of the Personalists. The Personalist movement owed its growth both to ponderous texts composed by serious philosophers and to the generalized enthusiasm of a young generation searching for a new language to express collective aspirations. In this essay, we will study the development of Personalism from 1930 to the end of the war — from its origins in Franco-German youth meetings in the early 1930s, to its evolution via Jacques Maritain

[1] A reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* called my *Emmanuel Mounier* (1981) 'the best book we have had on Personalism' but complained that it had failed to explain 'exactly what Personalism was.' In several articles and books published just after the war, Mounier himself artfully (if inaccurately) situated the Personalist movement in the mainstream of the 'humanist socialist' tradition. Since then, intellectual biographies of leading personalists such as Jacques Maritain, Denis de Rougemont, Mounier and Pope John Paul II, and newer studies of Personalist reviews such as *Esprit, Ordre Nouveau,* or *Sept,* have all helped fill in the picture.

There have been several highly technical discussions of the evolution of modern Polish 'Personalist' metaphysics — in the 'Lublin school,' for example — but no general studies. Yet Personalists believe that with the moral inspiration of the Vatican, and under the leadership of figures like Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa, Eastern Europe can follow a 'third way' and enjoy a less materialistic, less hedonistic and more spiritual way of life than the liberal democracies have achieved.

The closest thing to a general study of the Personalist movement is Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle's study of what he calls the French 'non-conformists' of the early 1930s, *Les non-conformistes des années 30* (Paris 1969). However, Loubet del Bayle does not follow his 'non-conformist' Personalists through the Popular Front of 1936, the war and the Vichy regime, and devotes scant attention to the important Belgian and German groups.

A general analysis of the Personalist movement would have to take into account aspects of the evolution of modern philosophy and theology and of the intellectual, political, and religious history of France, Germany, Belgium, Poland, the United States and Canada. It would also draw upon the issues in the contemporary debate over 'French Fascism' which Zeev Sternhell's work has done much to inspire.

and French groups and reviews such as *Esprit, Ordre Nouveau, Sept,* and *Temps Présent*, through the Vichy regime's National Revolution and Ecole Nationale des Cadres d'Uriage, to publications which grew out of the Resistance, such as *Le Monde*.

The story goes on beyond 1945; its more recent expression includes the ideas represented by the French *Chrétiens progressistes*, the theological background to the second Vatican Council, the 'new socialists' on the left wing of the French Socialist Party, the *Znak* movement in Poland, *Cross Currents* in the United States, and *Cité Libre* in Québec. The influence of Polish Personalists such as Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki (former editor of *Wiez*, the Polish *Esprit*) and Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) could also be traced, together with the Personalist inspiration of the Vatican's current Eastern Europe strategies, and the influence of Personalism on certain prominent apostles of European integration (Denis de Rougemont, Jacques Delors). But our immediate objective is to follow the historical development of Personalism from pre-war France through the Resistance, and to clarify its importance — already in those years — as a movement critical of the liberal democratic tradition (and of the Marxist-Leninist and the social democratic traditions as well).

Jacques Maritain Discovers the Person

In 1925, Jacques Maritain, a recent convert to Catholic authoritarianism from a liberal democratic, Protestant background,[2] published *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau*,[3] setting out a vast historical perspective to explain what had attracted him about the Church. Luther, he charged, had fostered a tendency toward libertarian 'individualism' that had been passed on to the Protestant cultures and done mankind a great deal of harm. Capitalism, for which Maritain had a visceral dislike, had its essential origins in that tendency, as did the perverse lack of deference for authority that characterized the liberal democracies. In the hierarchical authority of Catholicism, in the sense of collective identity and of the sacred that it fostered and in the epistemological analyses of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Maritain found an antidote to the follies generated by the libertarian, individualist

2 He was the grandson of Jules Favre, a founder of the Third Republic.
3 *Trois réformateurs: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau*, Paris 1925. The book was published in English in 1929 in New York and translated into Italian as *Tre riformatori* (Brescia 1928) by a young Maritain admirer, G.B. Montini (the future Pope Paul VI).

architects of the modern world.[4] Rousseau, on the other hand, was a 'communalist,' and Maritain took him to task for the rise of socialism and communism, which, in Maritain's view, had overreacted against modern individualism, generating vast collective movements in which the person was dissolved.

This broad scheme allowed Maritain to vaunt the 'personalist' merits of Catholicism over against both communism and the liberal democratic tradition. Catholicism was neither too individualistic nor too communalistic. It defended a mainstream European cultural heritage, a 'third way' that avoided both the distortions of the capitalist West and the repressiveness of the Communist East — and it nurtured 'the human person' in a way that liberal democracies never could.

Franco-German Youth in Revolt against the Bourgeoisie: The Söhlbergkreis (1930)

'Personalist' vocabulary, isolated in Jacques Maritain's early writings but common later on in the Vichy youth movements, really caught on in France when French young people became attracted to the German youth movements in the early 1930s, with their hiking trips, their excursions across Europe and their communal experiments. These young people no longer spoke merely of 'the person' as a particularly Catholic matter, but of 'Personalism' as a whole 'third way' philosophy of life, providing a decisive alternative both to the softness and mediocrity of the bourgeois liberal democracies and to the barbarity of Stalinism.

The French and German youths who began to gather at meetings that alternated between Germany and France included a number from the *Notre Temps* circle; led by Jean Luchaire, they were above all ardent pacifists. But there were also young French antiliberals and anti-democrats who admired the youth revolution in Germany and wanted something similar for France. These French 'spiritual revolutionaries' — mostly middle-class recent university graduates — began to use Personalist vocabulary to describe the ideals of their continent-wide youth revolution. Seeking a new, youthful kind of politics with a strong spiritualist thrust, they began to 'non-conform' to the political language

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4   As a young student, Maritain had desperately sought unequivocal certitude and so
    had been drawn to the doctrinal authority of the Catholic Church. He detested the
    lack of deference for authority which he saw as characterizing contemporary life. As
    a vivid illustration of where Lutheranism led, Maritain included a picture of Luther's
    thick-lipped, bloated death mask in his book. As for Descartes, he was not only an
    'individualist' like Luther but also an exaggerated rationalist.

and parties of the time. Some of the young Germans dreamt of a 'third way' national and socialist revolution in Germany, firmly spiritualist in orientation.

Many of the leading French youths came from Catholic backgrounds, but they were joined by young Jews with spiritualist aspirations. Some of the latter became very sympathetic to Catholicism (Marc Chagall, for example, began filling his paintings with Christian imagery and raised money for *Esprit*) or even converted, like the Russian exile Alexandre Marc, who co-founded the Ordre Nouveau group around 1930. There were also a few maverick Protestants, like Denis de Rougemont. Thus, the Personalism of the international youth movements came to have an ecumenical thrust that quickly bonded young people of different religious backgrounds in unprecedented ways.

Among the Germans youth movements, the 'oppositionists' (*der Gegner*) particularly attracted the French. Especially impressive was the handsome, charismatic young editor of the movement's review, Harro Schulze-Boysen, a born leader who came from a good family and had friends in high places. Of considerably less interest and less attractive were Adolf Hitler and his circle, but the French Personalists were much interested in the 'Strasser wing' of the National Socialists — Hitler's most serious rivals for control of the movement.[5] On the German side, a key figure in organizing the series of French-German and German-Belgian youth contacts was Otto Abetz, a tall, blond drawing teacher in the Gymnasium at Karlsruhe. Abetz was a pronounced Francophile who seemed, to the French, particularly critical of the Hitlerian wing of the National Socialists.[6]

After he was unanimously elected president of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Karlsruher Jugendbünde*, Abetz began organizing Franco-German youth meetings in a new youth hostel at the top of a mountain in the Black Forest, the Söhlberg, from whose summit the spires of the Cathedral of Strasbourg could be seen in the distance through the pines. Although the German youth movement seemed much more popular and dynamic than the French, the Germans did show interest in the new French ideas. Schulze-Boysen solicited texts from Philippe Lamour and Alexandre Marc to circulate among German young people. The Söhlbergkreis

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5 While Gregor Strasser was something of a country bumpkin, his more intellectual brother, Dr. Otto Strasser — proponent of a 'spiritualist' National Socialism — was well received on his visits to French and Belgian Personalist circles.

6 Abetz was considered hostile to the Hitlerians, at least partly because of what he considered their boorish attitude toward the French. Abetz's studies of art and of Spengler led him to focus his romantic yearnings on Charlemagne's Frankish Empire.

held a series of meetings in the two countries, and Otto Abetz began to publish elegant bilingual reviews, the *Söhlbergkreis* and later the *Deutsch-Franzousische Monatshefte/Cahiers Franco-Allemands*. These journals reflected the new ideas, a new politics transcending liberal democracy.

Hitler and his henchmen beat their way to the top of the National Socialist movement over several friends of the Personalists. While Söhlbergkreis alumni from the *Notre Temps* group made their peace with the Nazis, French Personalists tried to send arms to aid the struggle against the Hitlerians for control of the German youth movement. Otto Abetz, for his part, continued to publish sympathetic expositions of Personalism from Karlsruhe as he became, successively, a member of the Nazi Party, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop's chief expert on French and Belgian affairs, and, eventually, the German ambassador to occupied Paris.[7]

This international enthusiasm for the Personalist approach fostered a distinctive movement in France, as the French alumni of the Söhlbergkreis gathered regularly in a Parisian restaurant, Le Moulin Vert, to carry on in the spirit. Led by Philippe Lamour and Alexandre Marc, they published the short-lived 'international' review *Plans* to communicate their ideas. 'The person' — as opposed to the 'individual' and to communism — was critical to their thinking, as were interfaith dialogue, ecumenism, *Existenzphilosophie*, and the visionary drawings of the circle's guru, Le Corbusier, published on special art paper in *Plans*.

The Flourishing of Catholic Personalism, from the Popular Front to the War

It was particularly after the Catholic Emmanuel Mounier joined the Söhlbergkreis people who were talking international youth revolution in the Cercle du Moulin Vert that a distinctive and broad-based French movement grew out of this Franco-German enthusiasm for

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7 Cf. Martin Hieronimi & Hugo Rheiner, 'Der Personalismus, eine Geistige Ernuerungsbewegung in Frankreich,' *Deutsch-Französische Monatshefte/Cahiers Franco-Allemands*, II (1937), pp. 58–63.

Abetz only joined the Nazi party after years of hesitation. He sought out his Personalist friends from the old days when he arrived as German ambassador in occupied Paris, but they were nowhere to be found. Ribbentrop, a Catholic, set up an intelligence service in France which took a special interest in Personalism (seeking information from Schulze-Boysen, among others), and he was a subscriber to the French Personalist reviews. According to Denis de Rougemont, Ribbentrop took the term 'New Order' from the title of *Ordre Nouveau*. But this seems questionable, since the term had been employed earlier by others, including Gramsci.

Personalism.[8] Mounier, supported by a group of friends, decided that he wanted to publish a review 'like *Plans*, but Catholic.'[9] He urged Alexandre Marc to introduce him to the Personalism being bandied about in the Moulin Vert circles, including the original doctrinal work of Arnaud Dandieu, then a young Ordre Nouveau Nietzsche disciple working at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Although Mounier published Harro Schulze-Boysen's exhortation to French youth in his new *Esprit*[10] (founded in October 1932), he found the Nietzschean Personalism of Ordre Nouveau a bit jarring.[11] Marc then showed Mounier that Moulin Vert-style Personalism also appeared in a rich but more Christian guise in the writings of Otto Neumann, a brilliant young German Catholic thinker.

Otto Neumann Catholicized Personalism. He showed how the brightest current in the German youth movement revealed a quest for the spiritual, a thirst for mystical experience that Catholics could recognize as participation in the Mystical Body of Christ (a newly fashionable theological conception). Neumann's deft melding of Catholic spirituality with youth movement *geist* impelled Mounier to seek regular contact, to have him write more for *Esprit*. But Otto Neumann could not be located, because ... he was purely a fabrication of Marc's imagination. After repeated entreaties, Marc had to inform a despondent Mounier of Neumann's tragic, unexpected death.[12]

Mounier then constructed a distinctive Catholic-oriented Personalism of his own, an undertaking in which he was much aided by

8 Mounier was a bright young Catholic *agrégé* in philosophy with a strong literary bent. He leapt at the chance to abandon his doctoral studies in order to take on Jacques Maritain's projected review for the new generation of the Catholic intelligentsia in France.

9 Interview with Alexandre Marc.

10 Harro Schulze-Boysen, 'Lettre ouverte d'un jeune Français à l'Allemagne,' *Esprit*, no. 5 (February 1933), pp. 731–734.

11 Mounier did not respond very well to the *Ordre Nouveau* ideologist Arnaud Dandieu. See Mounier, 'Entretiens VI' (18 October 1932), in *Oeuvres*, IV (Paris 1963), pp. 507–509.

Dandieu, who was a friend and colleague of Georges Bataille at the Bibliothèque Nationale, died only a few months after Mounier met him. His unpublished papers in the BN show that he kept up regular discussions with Bataille, and that he was a more creative and original thinker than we had supposed.

12 Interview with Alexandre Marc. According to Marc, the initials O.N. stood for *Ordre Nouveau*. Marc was quite surprised to find an obituary, relating in detail the spurious circumstances of Neumann's tragic death, in a subsequent issue of *Esprit*.

When Mounier's collected works were published in 1963, the editor's listing of major events for the year 1933 included five in the area of religion: the first was 'Otto Neumann,' the last, the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. See Mounier, *Oeuvres*, IV (Paris 1963), p. 515.

Paul-Louis Landsberg, a German-Jewish refugee and disciple of the (sometime) German Catholic mystic and philosopher of 'community' Max Scheler.[13] This hybrid Personalism quickly drew interest and support in France far exceeding that attracted by Marc's more tightly knit and doctrinally rigorous Ordre Nouveau circle.

Concern about Marc's Personalism and about certain tendencies in the German youth movement led Jacques Maritain to withdraw from *Esprit*, warning that the review was adopting a 'goose-stepping philosophy.'[14] But Mounier's Personalism caught on in a new Catholic intelligentsia and found its way into a whole variety of reviews both popular and erudite. Catholics had felt alienated in secular, Republican France, and 'Personalism' captured certain basic values that they shared with others who believed strongly in invisible realities.

When France's neighbours successively went Fascist, the French Personalists and Catholics noticed that the regimes that followed often proclaimed more sympathy for 'spiritual values' than their predecessors had. In the 1930s, a number of activist groups with religious foundations or overtones were flourishing: the Young Christian workers, the Catholic trade union, the Young Christian students, the Catholic peasant organizations, the social activist *équipes sociales*, the discussion groups around certain reviews, some large Catholic and crypto-Catholic veterans' organizations, and the 'social circles' of army officers. 'Personalism,' whether that of *Esprit* or of *Ordre Nouveau*, seemed the perfect rallying cry to many of their members,[15] a useful language for introducing the spiritual dimension into the movement for national renovation.

Militant Personalists were not beyond envisaging antidemocratic, authoritarian alternatives to the Republic, leading many of them to join in the insurrection of the 'young Right' that nearly brought down the Third Republic during the riots of 6 February 1934.[16] These Personalists described themselves as opposing parliamentary democracy in the name of 'personalist democracy.' They were the representatives of a

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13 Landsberg died in a German concentration camp during the war. His *Problèmes du personnalisme* (Paris 1952) was published posthumously.

14 Jacques Maritain to Emmanuel Mounier (5 November 1932).

15 See J. Hellman, 'Les intellectuels catholiques et les origines idéologiques de la Révolution nationale de Vichy,' in Regine Robin & Maryse Souchard (eds.), *L'engagement des intellectuels dans la France des années trente*, Montreal 1990, pp. 69–80.

16 Notably André Déléage and the 'third force' of the *Esprit* group.

new politics that was 'neither Right nor Left,' but dedicated to the advancement of the human person.[17]

Although by 1936 many of their German friends[18] had been brutally put down by Hitler's supporters, the French Personalists still felt themselves part of a growing transnational movement and were assured of the continuing fidelity of their friends back in Nazi Germany.[19] Bright young Personalists approached the large, mostly Catholic veterans' organization, the Croix de Feu, to serve as theorists, advisers and propagandists.[20] They[21] worked with the 'plannists,' trade-unionists interested in rationalizing the French economy and countering the rising power of the Communist unions. Ordre Nouveau Personalists linked certain Catholic youth groups with the secret X-Crise group of ENS students who were envisaging long-term, authoritarian political projects to achieve the modernization of France.[22] The Communists (and Léon Blum's Socialists) would be stopped in their tracks by a youth movement espousing authority and efficiency, with remedies for the abuses of capitalism. The Personalists would foster more humane, personal and creative relationships in the workplace, and generate richer human communities than were possible in liberal democracies.

When France fell in June 1940, there was an impressive, ambitious Personalist network in France with a strong sense of collective identity.

17 Alexandre Marc had 'revue internationale' appended to the title of Mounier's new review *Esprit*, because they envisaged it as the French variant, or a distinctive French expression, of a youth revolution which at the time was most advanced in Germany. He correctly anticipated that, like *Plans*, it would be supported by organized circles of 'friends,' both in France and abroad.

18 Like Schulze-Boysen and Otto Strasser. The Manifesto of Strasser's Black Front was published in *Plans* on 10 December 1931, and a long exposition of his positions was published in early 1933 in three successive issues of *Esprit*.

19 Schulze-Boysen, for example, indicated as much in a letter of 7 March 1935 to Claude Chevalley (Marc archives).

20 Robert Loustau and Robert Gibrat, young engineers in the *Ordre Nouveau* and X-Crise groups, tried to work out a social doctrine for Colonel de la Rocque's Croix de Feu.

21 Notably Georges Lefranc.

22 Apart from their work with the Croix de Feu, Robert Gibrat and Robert Loustau approached Mounier in an effort to create a central telephone switchboard for the French youth movements. Both men later held important positions in the Vichy regime.

   The (unpublished) Marc correspondence with Jean Coutrot, leader of the X-Crise group, reveals this pattern. Members of Ordre Nouveau also introduced the radically authoritarian and elitist ideas of a young colonel named Charles de Gaulle into the best Parisian salons, arranged (in the person of Henri Daniel-Rops) to publish his writings, and gave lectures about them to various groups (interview with Alexandre Marc).

Esprit, Ordre Nouveau and other reviews, together with a variety of organizations, had·established a radical agenda touching on a range of issues. When the parliament voted the Republic out of existence in favour of Pétain's regime, the Personalists were there with the men and the programmes for what the Uriage elite school would call 'the Revolution of the twentieth century'[23] — the one that would forsake liberal democracy for the first totally counter-revolutionary government France had known since 1789.

Personalists at the Summit: The Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Cadres d'Uriage

From the fall of 1940, the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Cadres in the romantic alpine Château d'Uriage above Grenoble began producing new elites and leaders, dedicated to the Marshal, in what it described as a 'Personalist' spirit.[24] Its Study Bureau, replete with *Esprit* people,[25] was directed by Hubert Beuve-Méry, a brilliant professor of law, foreign correspondent and authority on Nazi Germany and the *Mocidade portuguesa* (the Portuguese youth movement),[26] who was to become the most important figure in post-war French journalism. This Dominican-raised, devout, but religiously innovative born leader made Uriage into a sort of think-tank for the National Revolution.[27] At the same

23 See Gilbert Gadoffre, *Vers le style du XXe siècle*, Paris 1945.
24 The 'Personalism' of the Uriage training is recorded in the dossiers in the school archives relating to school doctrine (Archives départementales de l'Isère, 102 J 12–13).
   Personalism continued to be taught at Uriage until the school provoked the jealous hostility of Pierre Laval, who closed it at the end of 1942 in the context of a power struggle within the Vichy government.
25 The key men who belonged to or worked with the Uriage Study Bureau had been associated with *Esprit* before the war. Besides Hubert Beuve-Méry, there were the philosophers Mounier and Jean Lacroix, essayist Bertrand d'Astorg, and the school's chaplain, the Abbé René de Naurois. Father Henri de Lubac gave lectures at the school from time to time and influenced the Bureau's thinking on religious issues. The Bureau also maintained ties with *Esprit* veterans who were serving as advisors at Vichy, such as corporatist economist François Perroux.
26 See his book *Vers la plus grande Allemagne*, Paris 1939.
   Beuve-Méry published his favourable description of the Portuguese youth movements in the Uriage publication *Jeunesse France!* ('Jeunesse Portugaise,' in *Jeunesse ... France!* no. 25 [1 December 1941], pp. 6–7). *Le Monde* journalist Laurent Greilshamer is frank in his book, *Hubert Beuve-Méry* (Paris 1990), about his subject's admiration for Salazar's Portugal.
27 Beuve-Méry's father left his mother when Hubert was quite young. The Dominicans in whose care he was placed discovered the boy's precocity and mystical bent, and they supported his studies. He always remained quite close to that order and its most innovative intellectual activities. At Uriage he circulated mimeographed texts of the evolutionary speculations of the Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,

time that several alumni and friends of the *Esprit* and Ordre Nouveau groups were helping to shape the social theory, youth initiatives and propaganda organs of the new government,[28] Uriage was placing its own men throughout the Vichy apparatus, particularly in secondary administrative positions.[29] The school also directed a whole fraternal network of regional schools whose leaders were almost all Uriage alumni, intensely loyal to the 'mother-school' and to Pierre Dunoyer de Segonzac, the *Chef* of Uriage, and his *moines-chevaliers*.[30]

The Uriage group was well organized and regularly published and circulated Personalist-oriented texts drawing upon classic *Esprit–Ordre Nouveau* formulations from the 1930s.[31] Its members were determined to form new sorts of elites in all areas of national life.[32] In many respects, this was the culmination of the larger, Catholic branch of the pre-war Personalist movement. Uriage produced new approaches to ethnology, psychology and theology, as well as new thinking about physical education, new cultural symbols and works of art and theatre. It aimed, ultimately, to fulfill the youth revolutionary's dream of creating a 'knight-monk' — a 'new man.'[33]

one of his major theological interests, as well as the ideas on work of his friend Marie-Dominique Chenu, also a Dominican.

28 Examples abound: one that has recently been documented is that of the devout Catholic Jean Jardin of Ordre Nouveau, who became Pierre Laval's right-hand man. See the biography of Jardin by Pierre Assouline, *Une éminence grise — Jean Jardin (1904–1976)*, Paris 1986. Robert Loustau headed the staff of Minister of Foreign Affairs Paul Baudoin, a Catholic. Gaston Bergery, who had several close colleagues from the old *Esprit* group, helped shape youth policy. The cultural movement *Jeune France* was run by Paul Flamand and Pierre Schaeffer, who had old Personalist ties. Radio-Jeunesse was directed by *Esprit*'s Roger Leenhardt. L.-E. Galey, a co-founder of *Esprit*, worked at the Compagnons de France and became Vichy's Directeur du Cinéma. Robert Gibrat, like his friend Loustau, held various administrative assignments in the regime. Pétain's godson and confidant Jacques Chevalier, an authority on Bergson and former mentor of both Mounier and Jean Lacroix, became Minister of Education.

29 Most of them were in agencies concerned with youth training, as demonstrated by the alumni addresses listed in the Uriage archives.

30 Archives départementales de l'Isère, 102 J 142–146: Ecoles régionales de cadres.

31 *Ibid.*, 102 J 14–22: Ecole nationale des cadres: doctrine; 102 J 23–25: Ecole nationale des cadres: bibliothèque et documentation.

32 In comparison with the leading schools of pre-war France, this new system was heavily Catholic: 10% of one of the cohorts of nearly 200 early trainees in the Uriage castle were seminarians. France's leading younger theologians, like Chenu and Jesuit Henri (later Cardinal) de Lubac made important contributions.

33 An excellent synthesis may be found in the seventeen-volume collection *Le Chef et ses jeunes*, Archives départementales de l'Isère, 22 J 28–22 J 33.

French young people were obliged to enrol in youth movements with strongly moralistic orientations, in conformity with the Personalist vision of the transformation of France into a 'Personalist community.' Even as Uriage Personalists condemned Vichy and Nazi excesses and protected their Jewish friends, they continued to supply the conceptual apparatus and the training (4,000 men passed through Uriage alone) for a very different kind of country — an authoritarian nation directed by technocrats, in which 'individualistic' liberalism and 'bourgeois' democracy would be abandoned, while moral and spiritual values would be fostered by official policy. To this end, Communists, Jews and masons would be relatively excluded from responsible positions in national life. While there were tensions with the occupiers, this new sort of France would certainly have been more comfortable in a European New Order dominated by Nazi Germany than would a liberal democracy like the defunct Third Republic.[34]

The Liberation: New Men, Power and Influence

The Uriage school was closed by the Laval government in the wake of a power struggle in December 1942, but an Uriage network — its key members united in a secret order which excluded masons and Jews[35] — remained very much intact, and in a particularly close

34 While Personalism became quite popular in Vichy France, several of the movement's founders were not at ease there. By 1942, the self-exiled Jacques Maritain, who had been privately critical of his French Personalist friends since the mid-1930s, became one of the leading figures of the French Resistance in North America. At the end of that year, Alexandre Marc, having refused an invitation to Uriage and engaged in Resistance activities, narrowly escaped arrest in France by fleeing to Switzerland. In the same period, Harro Schulze-Boysen was exposed as a key figure in the Rote Kapelle resistance group, which had been passing secret information to the Soviet Union, and Hitler had him decapitated with an axe. Until recently, he was considered an important Resistance hero in the DDR.

35 The Archives départementales de l'Isère contains a dossier on the Uriage order which includes provisional constitutions, annexes and directives (102 J 150).

Until very recently, members of the Uriage order denied its very existence, claiming that it had been no more than a dream, a project which never came to fruition. I am indebted to Antoine Delestre, author of the excellent study *Uriage* (Nancy 1989) and nephew of the secretary to Dunoyer de Segonzac, for information on the exclusionary provisions of the constitution of the Uriage order. This definitive constitution seems to be missing from the above-mentioned dossier in the Uriage archives in Grenoble, but Professor Delestre retains a copy.

Members took an oath of total obedience to Dunoyer de Segonzac and his lieutenant. Beuve-Méry was the authority in Dunoyer de Segonzac's (frequent) absences. Total 'transparency,' or frankness, was expected of the members in their comportment toward the leaders (according to handwritten notes by Beuve-Méry in the Uriage archives.)

relationship with the Resistance movement Combat directed by Uriage friend Henry Frenay.[36] At the liberation, Hubert Beuve-Méry and the men and women of the Uriage order dreamed of making Grenoble the capital of France,[37] while Beuve-Méry's newspaper, *Le Monde*, became 'another Uriage.' French Catholic intellectuals, Catholic *cadres*, were to remain at the centre of post-war French intellectual and political life. Personalism and Existentialism, the two great intellectual fads in post-war France, were no longer merely new and exciting ideas in the tiny circle of the Söhlbergkreis, as they had been in the pre-war decades. The Personalist movement contributed some key men to François Mitterrand's Socialist Party,[38] to the Federalist movement[39] and to the European movement in general.[40]

The influence of Personalism after the war was felt beyond the borders of France as well, particularly in Poland, where the Znak group, from the immediate post-war period, laid claim to Personalism in formulating its role as a parliamentary opposition movement. Key figures in the contemporary political transformation of Poland, including Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Pope John Paul II, have had long ties with the Catholic wing of the Personalist movement.[41]

36 It seems plausible, as Jean Moulin's former secretary Daniel Cordier has claimed, that Frenay went so far as to propose his old friend Dunoyer de Segonzac to succeed the betrayed and assassinated Moulin as head of the National Council of the Resistance. Frenay seems to have had a favourable attitude towards the early programme of the National Revolution, which, to him, represented a national, patriotic, anti-Germanic revolution, a Pétainist resistance. See Pierre Assouline, 'Interview: Daniel Cordier,' *Lire*, No. 169 (October 1989), p. 43.

37 Interview with Beuve-Méry.
    Among the prominent members of this Uriage network was Roger Bonamy, head of the Comité départemental de Libération de l'Isère and one of several members of the Uriage Order who infiltrated the French Communist party, and M. Lafleur, the mayor of Grenoble.

38 For the story of the Left-Catholic contribution to the Socialist party see Jean-François Kesler, *De la Gauche Dissidente au nouveau parti socialiste*, Toulouse 1990. Mitterrand himself has praised Mounier's historical role in this regard.

39 Alexandre Marc and Denis de Rougemont became prominent figures in a European federalist movement which, by 1990, was feeling vindicated.

40 European Community leader Jacques Delors spoke of his debt to Mounier at a meeting marking the fortieth anniversary of Mounier's death, held at the Lycée Emmanuel Mounier in Châtenay-Malabry, France, on 30 November 1990.

41 The review *Wiez* (The Link, *Le lien*), founded in 1958 and directed for years by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was central to the Polish trend. It was directly inspired by and even a direct imitation of *Esprit*, and, like *Esprit*, it could support communitarian initiatives by the government in the name of protecting society against liberal and democratic excesses, and of countering the ravages of the kind of unbridled individualism and moral permissiveness found in the West. Mazowiecki went from being a Znak

Personalism, then, was something quite new and exciting in the early 1930s when it was discovered by the French and German youth of the Söhlberg. It played an important but somewhat paradoxical and controversial role during the war, only to emerge thereafter with great influence upon certain European elites. The roles played by the Personalist movement during the Vichy years, under the Polish Communists and during the pontificate of John Paul II suggest that it is not easily situated on the political spectrum. One reason for this is that the Catholic tradition, while it has a strong populist current, also has something very anti-individualistic, antiliberal, antidemocratic and, usually, anti-Communist about it. The Franco-German youth movements of the early 1930s invented a language and an approach that proved useful to the prophets of a very different kind of France, and a very different kind of Europe.

The Catholic-oriented Personalist movement, even in its Uriage variant, should not easily be labelled a 'French Fascism,' any more than Salazar's Portugal should automatically be called Fascist. But the Uriage ideology certainly did not grow out of the liberal democratic tradition, or out of social democracy. It was an alternative to both, the importance of which we are only beginning to realize.

Personalist ideas, though they are profoundly critical of liberal democracy — as well as being anti-Marxist, anti-individualistic, and often anti-American — were nevertheless considered the inspiration of one of the most important humanistic movements of this century. The origins and history of this authoritarian and antiliberal influence in the Catholic world must interest a broader public concerned with phenomena like the 'New Right' in France, or the traditionalist revival in the Catholic Church. Although Personalism is usually viewed as populist, antitotalitarian, liberating, and of the left, its record is in fact ambiguous. The Personalist Pope John Paul II — and the Church he is trying to reshape in his image — are simultaneously conservative and progressive, authoritarian and populist.

deputy in the parliament to a position as a chief counsellor to Lech Walesa. He became editor-in-chief of the weekly *Solidarność* (1980–1981), and, eventually, the first prime minister of post-Communist Poland.

Karol Wojtyla, who wrote doctoral dissertations on the mysticism of St. John of the Cross and on Max Scheler's notions of community, made his mark as a serious philosopher in the Personalist tradition. Since becoming Pope, he has given a new life and orientation to several old Personalist themes. See John Hellman, 'John Paul II and the Personalist Movement,' *Cross Currents*, XXX (1980–1981), pp. 409–419.

Apart from constituting a formal dogma now being taught in philosophy classes as the thought of the Pope, Personalism is the expression of a collective mentality, a way of conceiving the individual's rights and relationship with society. It is a manner of being, a conceptual apparatus particularly suited to distinguishing differences between spiritual values of a certain type and the values of Communism and of the Western capitalist countries. The Personalist movement has provided a language that has enabled political and spiritual leaders to shape collective attitudes toward most of the major issues confronting East and West, including politics, family, sexuality and modernity, in a way that is distinct from and, in fact, often quite hostile towards the values of the liberal democratic tradition.

PART IV:

ITALY — PERMANENT CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY

Pier Giorgio Zunino

Weaknesses of the Democratic Tradition in Italy, 1920–1940

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The Italians' commitment to Fascism was long considered quite superficial. Fascism was assumed to have been no more than a mild breeze that had blown over Italian society. Two 'realities' were posited: an external, official, but at bottom 'false' Italy where Fascism had reigned, and an internal, unofficial, but at bottom 'genuine' or 'real' Italy which rejected Fascism. The Italy of Fascism was believed to lack an inner body.

With this perspective as a point of departure, two currents of thought dominated the perception of Italian history during the Fascist period. The liberal school argued, in Benedetto Croce's words, that Fascism was a mere 'parenthesis,' or an 'illness' from which Italy had completely recovered. In other words, between the liberal state that ante-dated Fascism and the post-war rebirth of democracy there had been nothing more than a brief 'bewilderment,' a shortlived lapse of moral consciousness. In this interpretation the Fascist government was void of inner strength, its ideology lacked social and political consistency, the Fascist ruling class was comparable to a gang of outlaws and the Duce was a 'sawdust Caesar.' Only guns and clubs had brought the Fascists to power. A second, Marxist, interpretation went even further in underestimating Fascism. Certainly, the Communists maintained, Italian society harboured dangerous 'germs' of dictatorship (owing to the power held by the industrialists, the agrarian class, the Church and so forth); but the majority — the broad social base of the workers and parts of the middle class — were unaffected by the Fascist virus. In sum, both leftists and rightists concurred in downgrading Fascism. Radical thought was scarcely more astute in its analysis. Even after the twenty-year dictatorship, the radicals could not bring themselves to admit that Fascist power had taken hold of the minds and souls of the majority of Italians. Deeply influenced by their own anti-Fascism, they

believed that the real face of Italy was represented by the underground opposition and the freedom fighters.

Only an in-depth cultural and political analysis of Italian post-war history could perhaps shed light on the reasons for the dominance of this particular image of Fascism. Recent studies have tended to reconsider the connecting links between the totalitarian state and Italian society. On the whole, the new orientation has derived from investigations of the role of intellectuals, ideology or culture.[1] Much light has been shed on the immediate background to the Fascist period. Crucially, it was found that cultural trends which had been evolving since the beginning of the century paved the way for Fascism's seizure of power. This conclusion in turn has led to new insights about the resilience and coherence of Fascist ideology. In the same vein, the support given Fascism by outstanding intellectuals is now perceived as more than an incidental phenomenon. It was not inconsequential that the fellow-travellers of Fascism included scholars and writers of world renown such as Pirandello, Ungaretti, Gadda and Praz, as well as virtually all of Italy's painters, architects and musicians.

As I hinted above, a serious flaw in the traditional interpretations was their inability to account for the longevity of the Fascist dictatorship. How did the Fascist regime last for twenty years if it was so weak? Some scholars have scanned the entire 1930s for the germs of the collapse, but with singularly little success. The truth is that only military defeat put an end to the dictatorship.

Furthermore, research has uncovered the inefficacy of the Resistance. Italy was liberated by Allied forces. The partisans played no substantial role in this, becoming a force to be reckoned with only at the war's very end. Their lack of popular support is shown by the near collapse of the Maquis under the pressure of the Nazi-Fascist troops when the Allies' drive was halted in the fall of 1944. As Gabriel Kolko has pointed out, in Italy as well as in France 'the Resistance was slow to begin and quick to end.'[2] Similarly, Spriano, in his history of the Italian Communist party, has shown that in the war's final two years the anti-Fascists lacked the will power previously claimed for them.[3] It bears stressing in this

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1 See E. Gentile, *Le Origini dell'ideologia fascista*, Bari 1980; P.G. Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo: Miti, credenze, e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime*, Bologna 1987²; M. Ostenc, *Intellectuels italiens et Fascisme (1915–1929)*, Paris 1983.

2 G. Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945*, New York 1968, p. 95.

3 P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano,, V: La Resistenza, Togliatti e il partito nuovo*, Torino 1975, p. 464.

connection that no more than four thousand dissidents were convicted during the entire Fascist era (in the early 1980s, by comparison, some 3,000 Red Brigades activists were incarcerated in Italian prisons, at a time when no one could seriously claim that Italy was on the verge of revolutionary upheaval).

These recent findings are still controversial for scholars influenced by the old schools of thought. My contribution, part of the new trend, endeavours to demonstrate the feebleness of the democratic tradition in Italian political culture.

ii

By focusing on two leading members of the liberal and radical groups of the time, Piero Gobetti and Gaetano Salvemini, we shall look first at a form of anti-Fascism which influenced a wide range of intellectuals in the Fascist era and afterward. The memory of the former (who died in exile in 1926) and the presence of the latter (regarded until the mid-1950s as something of a mandarin by the progressive intelligentsia) were focal points for the ideals and feelings of many of the non-Communist opponents of the dictatorship. However, when the Blackshirts first began overrunning the country, at the end of 1920, the democratic tenets of both men proved slippery. In this period, the country's liberal institutions and the bourgeois ruling class were heavily implicated in the blindness and moral culpability of the leadership. Bear in mind that the years from 1919 to 1922 witnessed two general elections and the rise and fall of six governments in rapid succession.

This was the background to Salvemini's declarations that no great differences existed between D'Annunzio and Mussolini on the one hand, and Giolitti, Bonomi and Salandra on the other hand.[4] Moreover, he had come to associate the parliament with feelings of 'disgust' and 'horror.'[5] These images, which at first seemed incongruous in the thought of a vigorous champion of morality and modernity in Italian society, gradually became more pervasive in the thought of the history professor from the University of Florence, as his diary shows. The parliamentary system of government, he argued, had been killed by the liberals, with the complicity of the social democrats, long before Mussolini's assumption of power. The Duce had merely

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4   G. Salvemini to G. Donati, 5 July 1921, in G. Salvemini, *Carteggio 1921–1926* (ed. Enzo Tagliacozzo), Bari 1975, p. 22.
5   G. Salvemini to Ettore Rota, 5 September 1921, in Salvemini, *Carteggio* (above, note 4), p. 27.

administered the *coup de grace* to institutions that were not worth keeping alive.[6] Striking expressions of Salvemini's attitude abound in his correspondence with friends in the early 1920s. 'All political parties, whether winners or losers, are characterized by the same moral vacuity and the same intellectual emptiness,' he wrote to one colleague. The majority of his correspondents shared these views. 'Things remain at the same point,' said one; 'Italy is only an endless pantomime,' wrote another.[7] 'Well, even this time Doomsday has not come,' Salvemini wrote in a letter in 1923, adding: 'Within a few years Mussolini will turn into a more authentic and more skillful Giolitti. This is how Italy wants to be ruled.' During a visit to London that summer he assumed the role of Don Juan, making fun of the London ladies and at the same time commenting on the situation in his own country: 'English women are the same as Italian society: nothing happens and nothing lasts.'[8]

The climax of this orientation was Salvemini's statement that dictatorship should be seen as part of the continuity that marked Italian history. Mussolini's authoritarian government, then, far from being a landmark in the Italian political experience, was another fleeting moment, a grain of sand in a desert. 'In Mussolini's "dictatorship",' he asserted, 'there is nothing new.' (By placing the word dictatorship in inverted commas, did Salvemini wish to suggest that the Duce's dictatorship was not a real one?) The new regime was actually no more oppressive than the old liberal governments because 'the life of the Italian parliament has always been a life of dictatorship.'[9] Thus, in the summer of 1923, when Mussolini introduced a bill to overturn the country's electoral system, Salvemini shrugged it off, remarking that it simply put an end to the electoral 'comedy.'[10]

Salvemini's disciple and friend Gobetti, in one of his first published articles (written when Fascism was not yet on the horizon), had already yoked the word dictatorship to the name of the person who epitomized the liberal ruling class, Giovanni Giolitti.[11] Then, as Fascism gained

6 G. Salvemini, 'Memorie e Soliloqui,' 18 November 1922, in idem, *Scritti sul fascismo* (ed. N. Valeri & A. Merola), Milan 1966, p. 5.
7 Salvemini to G. Vitelli, 9 November 1922; A. Monti to Salvemini, 16 November 1922; M. Missiroli to Salvemini, 24 November 1922, in Salvemini, *Carteggio* (above note 4), pp. 121, 136, 140 and 153.
8 Salvemini to Ernesto Rossi, 28 August 1923, in Salvemini, *Carteggio* (above, note 4), pp. 238–240.
9 G. Salvemini, 'Memorie e soliloqui,' 29 November 1922, in idem, *Scritti sul fascismo* (above, note 6), II, p. 20.
10 *Ibid.*, 26 and 27 November 1922, pp. 16–17.
11 P. Gobetti, 'Traditore o Incapace?' *Energie Nove*, 1–15 November 1918, in idem, *Scritti politici*, ed. P. Spriano, Torino 1969 (henceforth: *SP*), pp. 28–29.

strength, Gobetti became more outspoken in denying the existence of any crucial distinctions between it and liberalism.[12] Once the boundary between them had been erased, Gobetti went further, identifying not Mussolini but Giolitti with the 'heart of darkness' of Italian political life. Behind the scenes, Gobetti maintained, the revered veteran politician continued to play the role of Mussolini's prompter. In short, in the years when the dictatorship was taking shape, the core of the Italian political system continued to be the liberal ex-prime minister. Accordingly, Gobetti argued, it would be a great mistake to fight Mussolini without severing the deep roots, both moral and political, of his power. 'No, no,' he declared at the dawn of the new era, Mussolini must not be overthrown in order to restore the old regime;[13] the real enemy was not Mussolini but 'Giolitti's instinct to corrupt and uneducate.' It was better, Gobetti said, to allow the 'new Giolitti'[14] to proceed through all the stages of his career.

Gobetti carried his argument to extremes: Not only were Fascism and liberalism two sides of the same coin, but much of anti-Fascism belonged to the dark side of Italian society; its exponents were no more than the scum of the past. Mussolini therefore was not only better than his predecessors, but preferable even to the majority of the anti-Fascists. The opponents of Fascism (notably the Socialists, 'whose distant origins were the same as Mussolini's'[15]), as Gobetti saw them, were mere opportunists awaiting their opportunity to regain power. It was no less imperative to fight the 'would-be anti-Fascists' than to do battle with the actual Fascists. There were 'all sorts of Fascism,' and if the enemy was the 'recently formed and transient' official Fascism, so too was it the 'old and everlasting' Fascism.[16] This hidden Fascism, pervasive and woven into society's fabric, constituted the greater danger.

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12 Idem, 'Lo storicisimo di un mistico,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 7 December 1922, in *SP*, p. 435.
13 La redazione (Gobetti), 'Questioni di tattica,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 23 November 1922, in *SP*, p. 430.
14 P. Gobetti, 'Due tattiche,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 24 June 1924; idem, 'Dopo le elezioni,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 15 April 1924; both in *SP*, pp. 734 and 637. See also idem, 'Uomini e idee,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 26 February 1924, in *SP*, pp. 610–611.
15 Idem, 'Gli unitari a convegno', *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 20 November 1923, in *SP*, p. 545.
16 Idem, 'Le elezioni,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 12 December 1924, in *SP*, p. 585; 'Saluto all'altro parlamento,' signed by 'Il comitato centrale dei gruppi di "Rivoluzione liberale",' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 11 November 1924, in *SP*, p. 792.

The trend toward blurring, if not erasing, the dividing line between Fascism and anti-Fascism went hand in hand with an attempt to uncover internal differences within Fascism. Thus, Gobetti commended a certain type of provincial Fascism in which he found evidence of 'unselfishness and personal sobriety.' Many of the 'young people' in the rank and file of the Blackshirts had not turned to Fascism to solve their employment or financial problems; on the contrary, they had imbued Fascism with a moral integrity derived from a 'disgust with compromises and easy choices.' Gobetti spoke of a deeper Fascism in which one could find positive feelings; grass-roots Fascism might well be conscionable and, above all, might be useful in the effort to reconstitute society. Hence, one could appreciate and respect the young generation, with its 'sense of dignity' and 'spirit of sacrifice.'[17]

Gobetti's career ended with his premature death in 1926, at the age of twenty-five. His legacy, frozen from that point on, was appropriated by 'Giustizia e libertà,' a group that was to become one of the more vivid manifestations of anti-Fascism and, in the 1940s, a pillar of the Resistance (under the rubric 'Partito d'Azione'). Salvemini, on the other hand, having left Italy for exile in 1925, went on to become one of the leading anti-Fascists on the international stage. This new life experience led the professor of history, on several occasions, to re-evaluate the issue of democracy in relation to the Fascist question.

After two decades of strenuous struggle against dictatorship, and more specifically against widespread pro-Fascist sentiments in both Europe and America, Salvemini considerably toned down his bitterness toward pre-Fascist Italy. As his thought evolved, clear boundaries came to demarcate totalitarian regimes from liberal states, so that democracy, however flawed and even corrupt, could no longer be mistaken for autocracy. How far Salvemini had departed from his earlier views was demonstrated in a course he gave at Harvard University in the early 1940s on the origins of Fascism. His reappraisal of the liberal state demonstrated how far pre-Fascist Italy was from being a dictatorship, and showed democracy itself in a more realistic and pragmatic light. If one's point of departure was 'the perfect ideal of democracy,' he wrote, then 'no politician can escape hell.' Too narrow and too rigid a conception of democracy, Salvemini felt, was likely to pave the way to dictatorship. To put it another way: after the experience of Fascism, Salvemini asked less and less of democracy. His opinion of

17 P. Gobetti, 'Uomini e idee,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 19 February 1924, in *SP*, p. 609; idem, 'Commento quotidiano,' *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, 9 October 1923, in *SP*, p. 527.

liberal institutions and of the old ruling class underwent an extensive revision. The once implacable enemy of Giolitti, whom he had branded 'the Minister of the underworld,' now described him in far more moderate terms.[18]

Did the democratic ethos, then, enjoy a final triumph in Salvemini's thought? The burden of fifty years of political and cultural commitment, rarely brightened by success, weighed on Salvemini's latter-day view of democracy. His fitful participation in Italian public life, begun under a conservative monarchy and concluded during the odd democracy of the 1950s (an oddity that still remains), gave him a caustic view of the relations between rulers and ruled. Lingering doubts about the consistency of his democratic outlook cannot entirely be dispelled.

The rise of Fascism had already shown Salvemini that a philistine, if not barbarian, element vitiated the core of Italian society. He had a sense of belonging to a 'narrow, powerless minority'[19] in a world made up of 'scoundrels.'[20] There were those in his circle who chided him for his tendency to 'despise the human being,'[21] but the wounds that gave rise to that outlook never healed; indeed, the victory of Fascism made them incurable. His elitist background, shaped in part by Gaetano Mosca, reacted with the advent of Fascism to leave him with little confidence in man's capacity to live democratically. Hence, too, his eventual appreciation of the liberal state and of a figure like Giolitti: it may not have been a true democracy, but he knew that no more could be asked.

In Gobetti's thought, too, the question of democracy remained open. His orientation was epitomized in the name of the review he founded, *Rivoluzione liberale*. In several respects, the thrust of his 'liberal revolution' was toward the undermining of Italian society, an aim ultimately incompatible with liberal democracy. Indeed, Gobetti's preoccupation with the idea of revolution (although there was some confusion about its ways, means and goals for society) tended to overwhelm the liberal element, and led him to distrust democracy — not least because 'revolution,' in the twentieth century, has been perceived as inherently and radically antithetical to 'democracy.' It was not by chance that Gobetti increasingly drew close to the Communists

18 See, for example, the Introduction to W. Salomone, *L'età Giolittiana*, Torino 1949. The roots of Salvemini's reappraisal of Giolitti can be traced to his *Le Origini del fascismo* (1943), Milan 1961.
19 Salvemini to Rossi, 28 August 1923, in Salvemini, *Carteggio* (above, note 4), p. 239.
20 Salvemini to Rossi, 21 September 1923, in *ibid.*, p. 255.
21 Fernande Dauriac (Salvemini's wife) to Salvemini, 12 October 1923, in *ibid.*, p. 269.

of 'Ordine Nuovo,' a group whose leader, Antonio Gramsci, one of the century's greatest intellectuals, was imbued with a vividly antidemocratic streak.

The uncertain status of democracy in Gobetti's thought was reflected after his death in elements of the anti-Fascist movement, particularly in 'Giustizia e libertà,' whose numerous intellectual members included several who went on to become very influential in postwar Italy. In that group, attitudes toward democracy oscillated constantly between acceptance and rejection. Its programme called for the creation of a new democracy, but in the mid-1930s a great many of those who were fighting Fascism under its banner had ceased to believe in liberal democracy. They maintained that without a radical new departure, Italy was fated to endure some form of dictatorship.

Contributors to the movement's official review who called for a 'radical' revolution or urged attacking the 'evil at its roots' almost certainly did not have in mind an alternative resembling the political and social structure of a democracy. In time, as Fascism attained its greatest triumphs, democratic ideals were pushed even further into the shadows. The conquest of Ethiopia and the collapse of the Spanish Republic dismayed the anti-Fascist movement. It seemed ever more apparent that, in some Latin states at least, democracy could not withstand the onslaught of reactionary forces. 'Giustizia e libertà' responded by adopting an even more extreme attitude and looking to a future Italy in which a new ruling class would erase nearly every sign of the past. A strong state coupled with an iron will to refashion society at all costs: this was the medicine the group contemplated for healing society's ills. In short, in order to restore democracy they were hankering for a new dictatorship.[22] Events ultimately took a different course, and 'Giustizia e libertà' made a fundamental contribution to the reconstitution of democracy in the 1940s, but a streak of antidemocratic Jacobinism left an imprint on its ideology throughout its more than fifteen years of troubled existence.

iii

In terms of attitudes toward democracy, the Catholic Church stood at the opposite pole from Gobetti and Salvemini. The rise of Fascism affords an insight into Catholicism's inherently antidemocratic mindset. The Church's centuries-long struggle against democracy is well

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22 On this question see P. G. Zunino, *La questione cattolica nella sinistra italiana (1919–1939)*, Bologna 1975, pp. 411–419.

known (though Catholicism has also harboured certain democratic tendencies: liberal Catholics, modernists and so on). But this ostensibly clear-cut picture is somewhat confounded by the events of the inter-war period in Italy. A comprehensive analysis of the relations between Catholicism and Fascism is beyond the scope of this paper, but we shall cast our spotlight on certain areas that are particularly instructive about the lowly status of democratic ideals in Italian Catholicism until the turning point of the 1960s.

The first character in our narrative might also have been the last, since he exemplifies not only the ambivalent and often negative attitude towards democracy exhibited by Catholic activists in the inter-war period, but also the changed stance that brought about the new Italy of the post-war era. Alcide De Gasperi is regarded as one of the fathers of the Italian democratic state, perhaps even its main progenitor. Prime Minister from 1945 to 1953, he has been admired for resisting onslaughts on the young democracy from both the right and the left. But De Gasperi, a Catholic, had not always been an enthusiast of democratic tenets. His conversion, although genuine, came rather late, during the period of the Fascists' collapse. Remarkably, a similar intellectual development (again, both late and authentic) characterized the path of another father of present-day Italy, the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti. In both cases, the road to democracy was a long one.

De Gasperi began his trek under the velvety autocracy of the Hapsburg monarchy, as a member of the Italian Catholic minority residing in the mountainous area bordering the southern Tyrol. The problem of democracy rarely arose in those years, when the major issues were the defence of linguistic traditions and rivalries with other Italian minority groups that flaunted the banners of liberalism and Socialism. Not even when De Gasperi became an Italian citizen was democracy high on the public agenda; but afterward, as a distinguished member of the Italian Catholic party, he could not avoid taking a stand on the rise of Fascism.

Along with many others, he considered the Blackshirts a useful tool for thwarting the 'Reds.' He cheered the Fascist fury that was unleashed against Socialist organizations in the crucial years 1920–1922, even if that violence on occasion also affected Catholic labour organizations. True, De Gasperi was vexed by the turbulence; but fears of a Communist revolution overrode every other concern. With hindsight, we can be fairly sure that no real revolutionary upheaval threatened Italian society, but the contemporary upper and middle classes were convinced that they were on the edge of the precipice. Not surprisingly, De Gasperi

made several statements condoning Fascism in the spring of 1921. 'I do not agree,' he said, 'with those who condemn Fascism because of its violence. There are situations in which violence, though it may have the semblance of aggression, is actually defensive behaviour. In that case violence is legitimate.' A famous passage from Alessandro Manzoni's famous novel, *The Betrothed*, made the point vividly: 'It is a bad thing to punch a gentleman, but once he has received the blow not even the Almighty can undo it.'[23] In the same way, De Gasperi spoke of the need to delegitimize liberal democracy in order to save society from the surging Red tide. In the following years, until the assassination of Socialist parliament member Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, De Gasperi maintained his equivocal attitude toward Fascism. Even as he warned Fascist squads not to overstep the bounds in their illegal activity, he continued to praise their efforts to wipe the slate clean.

He was ready to collaborate with Mussolini's government. It was a duty, he argued, to join forces in order to create a new state and a new society. The blood streaming from the wounds caused by Fascist assaults must be forgotten; it was time to gather under a single banner all the enemies of the Socialist ·and Communist utopias. While De Gasperi continued to uphold the democratic state as an ultimate goal,[24] one can only wonder what kind of deformed democracy would have emerged from the Blackshirt womb. In any event, after a brief period of open opposition to the dictatorship, during which he barely avoided being thrown into Fascist jails, he slipped into the silent chambers of the Vatican library, where he worked as a simple clerk. Although he kept aloof from politics for the next fifteen years, he never stopped writing.

One subject that intrigued him was the Fascist idea of a corporate state, adduced in the late 1920s. This was a classic topic in Catholic thought which arose with new vigour in the 1930s, when many Catholic thinkers, in Italy and elsewhere, were deeply involved in what seemed like a genuinely new proposal to reform capitalist societies. In Fascist corporatism, presenting as it did an alternative both to liberal individualism and to stifling collectivist regimentation, De Gasperi found (or believed he had found) the future of twentieth-century societies. He wrote voluminously on the subject in the late 1920s and early 1930s, enthusiastically approving the announcement of national

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23 Cited in P.G. Zunino, 'Saggio introduttivo' to *Scritti politici di Alcide De Gasperi*, Milan 1979, p. 29.
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 30–36.

planning to transcend the classes. It was nothing less, in his eyes, than the embodiment of everything the Catholics had advocated since the *Rerum novarum* of Leo XIII. Fascism had brought the bourgeois liberal state to the breaking point.[25]

But could the corporatist idea really be reduced to its economic elements alone? Was the change in the rules of the marketplace wholly divorced from a radical shift in the political rules? In other words, was the relationship between corporatism and dictatorship merely accidental? De Gasperi had a clear sense that the economic aspects of corporatism should be viewed from the larger political and institutional perspective, and the issue of democracy thus remained at close range. He tried to avoid an unequivocal condemnation of democracy, noting that Catholic tradition had enabled a conciliation between corporatism and free elections, but he immediately added that there is no necessary connection between corporatism and any particular political system. 'There are very different ways and routes to corporatism,' he wrote. This was so 'above all in regard to the debate about democracy and the authoritarian system.' The route for some is democratic, for others totalitarian: 'The countries in which the political systems experienced a great shock in the post-war period adopted the authoritarian system. The others, who remained attached to democracy, are trying to establish the corporatist system by a different approach.'[26]

De Gasperi, then, did not slam the door in democracy's face. Nevertheless, his pronouncements on the subject show that democracy, in his political vision, was a mere detail in the shaping of the future society. This conception of democracy, which we might call 'discretionary,' reveals De Gasperi's understanding of the fundamental goals of politics: defeating materialist forces, cracking down on collectivism, extirpating laicism. Democracy had displayed great weakness in achieving these objectives, in comparison with which freedom and a representative system were secondary concerns.

iv

Leaving the layman De Gasperi, to whom we shall return later, we move now to trace the course of the antidemocratic tradition in Catholicism, focusing on a group of thinkers and writers who were or had been

25 See his articles concerning corporatism, written in 1933–1934 and reprinted in De Gasperi, *I cattolici dall'opposizione al governo*, Bari 1955.
26 See Zunino, 'Saggio introduttivo' (above, note 23), pp. 47–48 (the writings cited were published in 1935).

members of the clergy. We refer to the Jesuit fathers associated with the extremely influential biweekly *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and to the boisterous Franciscan Agostino Gemelli, founder and for fifty years absolute sovereign of one of Italian Catholicism's most important institutions, the Catholic University of Milan. We shall also examine the underlying reasons for the solidly antidemocratic sentiments harboured by a personality who was a true *éminence grise* from the 1930s through the papacy of John XXIII. Although few have heard of him today, the name of this priest, Giuseppe De Luca, embellishes one of the five doors of St. Peter's, and there is good reason to believe that one of the figures sculpted by Giacomo Manzug is of him. Last but not least, we shall see how the former priest Romolo Murri, the undisputed leader of Italian political modernism, fits into the puzzle. Like many others who underwent the modernist experience at the beginning of the century, he ended up embracing Fascism.

The corrosive criticism of democracy delivered by these Catholic clerics was incisive and consistent. Their antidemocratic onslaught, encouraged by the rise of the dictatorship, encompassed the entire liberal and democratic structure in Italy. As they saw it, the vigorous posture adopted by nineteenth-century Catholicism had been vindicated beyond the shadow of a doubt. Representative government had proved unable to provide solid girders for society. Corruption, confusion and immobility: what else had parliament produced in its sixty years of existence? It bears noting that this group, too, like Salvemini and Gobetti, did not hesitate to use the word 'dictatorship' to define what it perceived to be the true essence of liberal governments. Parliament, in their analysis, although it claimed to express the authentic and true will of the people, had actually become the management committee for a few cliques which dominated it through the manipulation of governmental mechanisms that were democratic only in appearance. In short, this form of government constituted the resurgence, with only slight differences, of the old despotism, but in an even worse mould — for it now left Catholicism on the sidelines.[27] Because of its heavy emphasis on the individual, Father Gemelli declared that the new ethos had removed 'God from the centre of the world and replaced Him by man.' Evil, he warned, was rampant

27 'La soglia del quarto decennio del secolo,' *La Civiltà Cattolica* (henceforth: *LCC*), I (1931), p. 113; review of G. Vianne, *La France Veut un Chef* (Paris 1934), *LCC*, IV (1934), p. 306.

in that act of arrogance, in which the 'cause of every kind of scourge' lay hidden.[28]

It is difficult to imagine an intellectual and personal biography more unlike that of the fiery Franciscan Gemelli than that of Romolo Murri. However, even for the rebellious ex-leader of Italian modernism, as he wrote, 'the freedom of the individual was an unconstructive force, dissociative and antisocial.'[29] True, individualism and freedom were not the same thing, but they sprang from the same origins, then converged and fused into a 'hollow and formal concept of freedom,' a freedom that Murri found to be more 'apparent than real' and was at bottom a 'swindle.'[30] Fortunately for the advancement of their point of view, men like Murri concurred, in the 1920s and 1930s, that the 'decline' of parliamentarianism had been accompanied by the 'bankruptcy of individualism.' Thus, as early as 1924, Murri could declare that the wheel of democracy had come full circle.[31]

Ten years later, the Jesuit fathers could argue that democracy, like the aristocracy, had had its day, and that it was time for a form of government 'more in keeping with the nature of things.'[32] The eternal visitor to the holy corridors of power, Don De Luca, would also assert serenely that liberalism was collapsing 'everywhere' and that 'today men are moving with different ideas toward different destinations.'[33] With a touch of that subtle perfidy associated with extreme cultural refinement combined with a will to seize the opportunity of the moment, De Luca summed up his view of liberalism and democracy by citing Francois Villon's plaint: 'Où sont les neiges d'antan?'[34]

Once installed, the government, in the opinion of the Jesuit fathers, could demand almost blind obedience. From this point of view, the

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28 A. Gemelli, 'La carità e l'ora presente,' in idem, *Vita e Pensiero*, September 1933, pp. 561–562. On the link between Gemelli and Fascism see R.A. Webster, *The Cross and the Fasces: Christian Democracy and Fascism in Italy*, Stanford 1960. See also G. Rumi, 'Padre Gemelli e l'Università Cattolica,' in *Modernismo, fascismo e comunismo: Aspetti e figure della cultura e della politica dei cattolici nel '900*, Bologna 1972, pp. 205–233; and idem, 'In margine al centenario di Agostino Gemelli: due documenti su Università Cattolica e fascismo,' in *Storia contemporanea* (1979), nn. 4–5, pp. 1019–1040.

29 R. Murri, *L'idea universale di Roma: Dalle origini al fascismo*, Milan 1937, p. 317.

30 Idem, 'Libertà,' *Il Resto del Carlino*, 30 May 1924.

31 F. Olgiati, 'La fisionomia del Novecento, *Vita e Pensiero*, March 1938, p. 111; F. Gemelli, 'La carità e l'ora presente,' *Vita e Pensiero*, September 1933, p. 562; R. Murri, 'Critica della democrazia,' *Il Resto del Carlino*, 25 October 1924.

32 A. Brucceleri, 'Dal corporativismo dei cristiano-sociali al corporativismo integrale fascista,' *LCC*, I (1934), p. 454.

33 G. De Luca, 'Elogio dell'avvento dell'ultimo secolo,' *Vita e Pensiero*, April 1933, p. 237.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

origin of Fascist power was of little importance; what counted was that it had put an end to the disorder and anarchy that might have led to constitutional reforms far more antithetical than dictatorship to the ideals and interests of Catholicism. Thus, obedience to the totalitarian state was 'a need of the social order required by the laws of nature.' Society, claimed the Jesuits, cannot remain in a state of anarchy, that is, without a concrete and visible authority able to maintain social order. Once the form and content of that authority has definitely been established, 'whoever has taken charge, even illegitimately, is the only one capable of preserving order, namely, by passing laws and enforcing them .... In other words ... the illegitimate authority, which seems to be a contradiction in terms, actually denotes a just law .... Therefore, it has the right to demand obedience when it prescribes something for the public good.'[35]

These texts are fundamental for an understanding of the antidemocratic thrust that carried such a representative section of Italian society until World War II. Rarely, moreover, has Scripture been invoked so blatantly to justify the rejection of certain cardinal principles of democracy as it was by leading Catholics in 1926. Quoting Jesus's command to 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's,' they declared that the Caesar of the age was Mussolini, who did not try to hide his illegitimate and violent origins, while the Pharisees were the anti-Fascists, the 'modern sophists' who rejected the dictatorship.[36] Still more explicit approval, if that were possible, came in 1927, when it was claimed that 'no matter what the contingent form of government, and despite the wickedness and ineptitude of the rulers,' citizens had an absolute duty to contribute to the 'common good' by 'submitting to the constituted authority and working together to correct and improve it, rather than by overthrowing it.'[37] The Jesuit fathers readily admitted that the negative traits of the rulers might raise serious doubts about their quality, but then, no form of regime was completely free of 'drawbacks or dangers,'[38] and awareness of them did not eliminate the 'need for social order,'[39] to which citizens without exception had the 'obligation ... to submit.'[40] In this imperfect world, the good Jesuits seemed to be saying, one had to be realistic in one's expectations. Theory

35 'Autorità e opportunismo politico,' *LCC*, II (1927), pp. 392–393.
36 *Ibid.*
37 'L'equivoco del laicismo,' *LCC*, II (1927), p. 306.
38 'Autorità e opportunismo' (above, note 35), p. 391.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 392.
40 *Ibid.*, p. 391.

and practice, the ideal and the real, should not be confused. While the Fascist government was not the epitome of perfection, outside it lay only the utter darkness of Socialism, Communism and democracy.

Don De Luca, invoking less ritual terms, reaffirmed the central importance played by authority in the social reality as he saw it. Out of the 'liberalist decay' arose the irrepressible aspiration for 'a law, a force, something that says no to all those things that have until now been allowed.' A 'superior principle' was required to serve people and societies as a reference point, a stable anchor after the excesses that had been committed in the name of Voltaire's *raison* or Rousseau's *coeur.*[41] In the pages of the Vatican's daily, De Luca again expressed the aspiration toward something 'stationary and eternal,' both in individuals and in 'social aggregations' — an aspiration that democracies could not permit.[42] If we may be forgiven an anachronism, De Luca's unbending attitude towards a past marked by chaos and disintegration might be summed up in the colorful statement uttered by a general thirty-five years later on: 'La chienlit c'est finie.'

Liberal democracy did not offer the reference points which these thinkers, appalled at a society that seemed to be buckling before the assaults of multiplicity and pluralism, considered absolutely essential. The word 'democracy' was not, nor could it be, entirely absent from De Luca's cultural heritage, just as it often turned up in other sectors of Fascism. However, he used it to define a notion that was nothing if not dictatorial. Thus, he spoke of a 'guided democracy, one which was not left to itself,' or 'a democracy that was constructive and not destructive.'[43] Implicit in these concepts was the idea that society and the state must have at their core a nucleus of original, almost primeval authority, unlimited and unconditioned from without. Problems of legality or legitimacy were immaterial. What counted was 'action,' emanating from a vantage point of complete supremacy. It is not difficult to read into De Luca's comments on democracy the very obliteration of its guiding principles.

Elsewhere in De Luca's writings we find crystal-clear references to the 'sin of so-called democracy' against the two 'natural classes' that were the focus of the writer's social vision, namely 'the few patricians and the numerous lower classes.' Democracy had vitiated the ideals of both classes and brought about their material corruption. The elites,

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41 G. De Luca, 'Sopra due libri di morale,' *Studium*, 1933, pp. 476, 484.
42 Idem, 'Come gli americani scoprirono l'Italia,' *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 January 1934.
43 Idem, *Il Cardinale Bonaventura Cerretti* (1939), Rome 1971, p. 355.

who felt their importance diminished and sensed that they had been stripped of their identity, were on the brink of turning into mere bourgeoisie; and the lower classes, too, would meet a similar fate once they lost their 'powerful simplicity, their pure ignorance, their creative freedom ..., their faith which is not credulity.'[44] From this perspective, bourgeoisie and democracy were linked by a common conception of life which, as De Luca wrote in 1939, was entirely 'limited to the earthly, to money, mechanical progress and wealth.'[45] Christianity had to take a determined stand against parliamentary democracy. It was all very well for De Luca to say that the Christian, in his quest for the infinite and the eternal, needed to beware of becoming dangerously infatuated with this or that political doctrine, as all such doctrines were 'ephemeral,' as well as being 'inflated and bombastic.'[46] His outlook, like that of many Catholic thinkers in those years, was deeply antidemocratic and effectively gave cultural and theoretical sanction to a totalitarian regime.

Murri, too, hedged on the concept of democracy. Declaring himself in favour of an 'organization of democracy,' he played a variation on De Luca's theme, using the word 'democracy' as a hollow shell to be stuffed with a historical and conceptual orientation that was strictly antidemocratic. This was perfectly in tune with the nascent Fascist ideology, which bandied such oxymorons as 'organized democracy,' 'hierarchical democracy,' 'centralized democracy' and 'authoritarian democracy.'[47] It was a lexicon shared as well by the intellectual circles of the Catholic University, where utterances like those of Monsignor Seipel, lauding the merits of 'real democracy,' by which he meant a 'correctly understood democracy,' were welcomed.[48] The true core of this antidemocratic thought resided in two basic premises: a rejection of political modernity and an organic conception of society.

Socialism and Communism — to address the first point — seemed to be a mere outgrowth, or only a very secondary variant, of the principles and conceptions that had marked the growing disparity between the modern world and Catholic thought. From Murri to De Luca, from the Jesuits to Father Gemelli, constant reference was made to the collective 'apostasy,' as it was called, which had begun in the sixteenth century.

44 I. Speranza (= De Luca), 'Il cristiano come anti borghese,' *Il Frontespizio*, February 1939, p. 90.
45 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
46 De Luca, *Il Cardinale* (above, note 43), pp. 352–355.
47 See Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo* (above, note 1), pp. 180–183.
48 I. Seipel, 'Critica della democrazia,' *Vita e Pensiero*, August 1929, pp. 689–690, n. 11.

There lay the roots of the evil which authoritarian regimes like the Fascist dictatorship sought to eradicate. Hence, a 1927 article in *Civiltà Cattolica*[49] spoke of the need 'to return political science to the sources of the Christian traditions, from which path it had strayed as a result of the Reformation.'

The full impetus of the Fascist experience seemed to throw the genesis of the contemporary crisis into bold relief. Thus, Father Brucculeri wrote in 1934: 'From humanism, which began the revolution against the Middle Ages, and Christian thought, which was totally pervasive in those times, to Bolshevism, which would like to give us the monstrous innovation — something unheard of in human history — of a godless society, we can trace a line that starts from the Reformation and continues through encyclopedism, the great revolution, illuminism and nineteenth-century scientism, revealing the process of de-Christianization that extends to the end of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century, and leading to naturalism and materialism.'[50] Father Gemelli, who had drawn up a sort of anti-modernist manifesto as early as 1914,[51] was again unsparing in his comments on this theme, urging that we 'wipe out' the scum of history that in four centuries had led to the shattering of the traditional bond between the church and society.[52] De Luca would have had society leap back over the Reformation and return to the Middle Ages, where social harmony and spiritual equilibrium found their perfect and ideal expression.[53] Nor was that old-time agitator Romolo Murri going to miss this opportunity to climb on the antimodernist bandwagon. For him, too, Renaissance, Reformation and bourgeois society and ideals were one and the same thing, grouped together in his gloomy vision of a 'sick Europe.' Pointing to the Renaissance, he would exclaim good-naturedly: 'The problems start here.'[54]

Obviously, the problem of democracy was organically linked to humanism and the Reformation by manifold sinews, yet all in all it was a slender connection. That period was perhaps only the

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49 'La critica del P. Taparelli agli ordini rappresentativi e l'apologia di Montalembert,' *LCC*, II (1934), p. 140.
50 A. Brucculeri, 'In fondo alla crisi,' *LCC*, II (1934), p. 140.
51 F. Gemelli, 'Medioevalismo,' *Vita e Pensiero*, December 1914, pp. 1–24.
52 Idem, 'Chiesa e Stato', in *Studi storici e giuridici per il decennale della Conciliazione tra la santa Sede e l'Italia*, Milan 1939, cited in P. Scoppola (ed.), *La Chiesa e il fascismo. Documenti e interpretazioni*, Bari 1971, p. 332.
53 F. Gemelli, *Idee e battaglie per la coltura cattolica*, Milan 1933, p. 230.
54 R. Murri, 'Roma e il problema Europeo,' *Critica Fascista*, 1932, p. 453, n. 23.

spark of what our thinkers surely considered a spiritual and social catastrophe, but the explosion came two centuries later with Voltaire, the *Encyclopedie* and illuminism, the doctrine of natural law and humanitarian ideologies. As the 'Roman priest' De Luca would remark in 1932: 'The Reformation removed the collective trust in God: it reduced God to an idea. Encyclopedism got rid of even that idea. And we became completely blind to ourselves and our ideas.'[55] Rarely has the two-pronged thrust of anti-illuminism and pro-Fascism been conveyed more clearly and incisively than in the writings of that strange character, De Luca. If one did not know how deep-rooted these ideas were in the intellectual history of Catholicism, one might almost say that De Luca's animus against the eighteenth century had become a personal obsession. Even in the regime's waning days he could still take up the matter with Giuseppe Bottai, one of the Fascist regime's foremost historians. De Luca, who considered himself Bottai's spiritual adviser, stressed the need to uphold fully the regime's commitment to 'eradicate illuminism.'[56] But his entire behind-the-scenes presence in that Italy which was half Fascist and half Vatican was indelibly stamped by his anti-illuminism.

In 1928, Father Gemelli cited the dissolution of the triple unity of the religious, intellectual and ethical spheres as the catastrophic consequence of man's turning away from God.[57] For this, the Reformation and the *Encyclopedie* were lumped together with liberalism, democracy and socialism to bear the lion's share of the blame. In the eyes of the antidemocratic Catholic culture that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, modernity was identified with democracy, and both betokened moral anarchy. As Gemelli wrote in his 1914 polemic, this 'poor modern culture' constituted a mere 'mechanical aggregation,' defined by the absence of an 'organic conception' of society. It was an assortment of confused and contradictory elements that were proliferating 'owing to superimpositions or juxtapositions.' All the achievements of four centuries, he wrote, boiled down to a 'heap of gravel.'[58] These assertions precede the advent of Fascism by seven years, yet they abound with concepts that marked the contribution of Catholic thought to the weakening and then the destruction of democracy in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s.

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55 I. Speranza (= De Luca), 'Luoghi del Faust,' *Il Frontespizio*, July 1932, pp. 3–4.
56 De Luca to Giuseppe Bottai, 15 December 1941, in G. Bottai & G. De Luca, *Carteggio, 1940–1957*, ed. R. De Felice & R. Moro, Rome 1989, pp. 29–30.
57 F. Gemelli, *Idee e battaglie* (above, note 53), p. 478.
58 Gemelli, 'Medioevalismo' (above, note 51), p. 25.

Fascism, on the other hand, seemed to offer an answer to the 'need for synthesis' in the form of the 'common adherence of people to certain fundamental and essential truths'[59] — a recomposition denied by modern democracy at the same moment that it proposed itself as a form of organization of collective life. The concept of state and society as an organic unit, a fusion into a unity of knowledge, is faithfully reflected in Gemelli's 'pyramid,' an image both plastically and metaphorically evocative of antidemocratic thought. It is a solid, hard form, perfectly definable, exuding a sense of absoluteness and immobility, a compact body with sharp edges converging toward a predetermined point, unequivocally denoting the presence of a 'top' and a 'bottom.' Neither Gemelli nor the others bothered to elaborate on the politically charged connotations and allusions of this kind of image, which were certainly present, albeit without conscious intention. This reticence contrasts sharply with their explicit critique of the intellectual and political revolutions of the modern world for having destroyed the fundamental unity of thought and action.

The image of the pyramid was complemented and later overshadowed by a second classical metaphor, that of society as 'a living body with tissue and organs.'[60] In the years of the dictatorship, the concept of the organism became the symbolic image for the ultimate vision of Fascist society. The 'glorification of the individual,' considered the basis of liberal democracy, was rejected.[61] Instead of the individual wandering freely but aimlessly within a society that was a mere 'mass,'[62] the Jesuits called for an 'organized hierarchical body'[63] The perceived antithesis between individual and mass, as between cell and organ, could be rectified only by an authoritarian restructuring of social relationships. This would also eliminate the problem of what Murri had seen as the original sin of the liberal-democratic system, the absence of 'universal rule.'[64] Whatever the formula adduced for the organic society, the ultimate purpose was always the same: to ensure that the group and the collective prevailed over the individual. As Gemelli colourfully put it, individualism was 'disappearing in the

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59 Idem, *Idee e battaglie* (above, note 53), p. 482.
60 A. Brucculeri, 'Dal corporativismo dei cristiano-sociali al corporativismo integrale fascista,' *LCC*, I (1934), p. 226.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 449.
62 *Ibid.*
63 *Ibid.*
64 R. Murri, 'Il problema europeo e la legge dell'unità,' *Critica fascista*, 1932, p. 434.

eddies of a relentless storm.'[65] An 'order of ideas' and an 'order of beings'[66] were the twin pillars upon which society might be rebuilt. The conservative Catholics looked forward to the immutable harmony that only a totalitarian regime could impose.

Organicism, order, unity and hierarchy — all pointed in the same direction, toward an essential ingredient in the antidemocratic thrust of nascent Fascism: the elimination of any distinction between state and civil society. De Luca's condemnation of that 'liberalism [which] separates political life from private life'[67] was to be taken literally. The Jesuits had a similar notion of linking up all the elements of society, of incorporating the 'soul in the body' within a larger framework of fusing the multitude of 'associated wills'[68] into a single collective movement. This tendency to eliminate civil society as a distinct category, separate from the state, extends to the textual level as well, and even to abstract theory.[69] When these Catholic thinkers sought to describe 'in what life in civil society might really consist,' they spoke of an environment where the 'associated wills' were dominant, where authority prevailed and where there was a 'central power that incorporated the abstract right to lead, direct and obligate.'[70] This bloating of the notion to include the central authority may have owed something to conceptual crudity, but the crucial point is that the absence, even at the linguistic level, of the idea of a civil society — the milieu of freedom — reveals the antidemocratic origins of these currents of thought.

Corporatism was simply the economic aspect of this vision of the state and of an essentially authoritarian society. In many ways, it represented merely an internal variant of organicism, and it was seen as the benevolent revival of the old medieval Catholic stricture against atomism, standing against the clash of contrasting wills and against multiplicity, considered a diffusive element that did not generate wealth. Once upon a time, all the threads of society had been woven into a harmonious framework; body and soul had converged toward a single goal, and there had been no divisions or irreconcilable contradictions. This bright picture of the past may look utterly mythical to us, but possibly it was not so for Gemelli and his colleagues; in any event, they knowingly exploited its fascination in their effort to galvanize a

65 F. Gemelli, 'La carità e l'ora presente,' *Vita e Pensiero*, 1933, p. 562.
66 Idem, *Idee e battaglie* (above, note 53), p. 92.
67 Fuligatto (= De Luca), 'La civiltà vista dall'uscio,' *Il Frontespizio*, 1940 (no. 1), p. 14.
68 A. Messineo, 'La vita dello stato e il caso di necessità', *LCC*, III (1936), pp. 130–131.
69 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
70 *Ibid.*, p. 130–131.

variety of social and cultural forces, not all of which might strictly be termed Catholic.

From this point of view, Fascism seemed about to restore, through corporatism, an era when terms such as 'class,' 'individuals' and 'civil society' were nonexistent. Once business was rid of the same independence and freedom that had been removed from political life, the grand circle of the Catholic antiliberal revolution would be closed. As it turned out, though, civil society was more easily excluded from the political than from the economic realm. Financial circles, some of which were among the regime's mainstays, balked at such ideas. Countless intellectuals and politicians would debate the pros and cons of corporatism, the corporative myth would cross the Alps to influence Mounier, and even find its way across the ocean, to impinge on the thinking of Roosevelt's officials. In practice, however, the 'new form of public regimen' remained on the shelf, or was confined to a handful of bombastic acts.[71] We have 'a Christian philosophy in our head and Christian justice in our heart,' a Jesuit father wrote in 1928.[72] When all was said and done, however, the antidemocratic philosophy may have been able to express itself fully in the Fascist age, but the appeals for justice remained hollow words.

How that political culture and that vision of history enabled Italian Catholic politics to become the central force in the post-Fascist reconstruction is too grand a theme to be considered here. Certainly, until the last days of the dictatorship, and in some cases even afterward, a profound suspicion of and hostility toward democratic ideals persisted. A case in point is Alcide De Gasperi, the statesman who would stamp his mark on the Italian republic over which he ruled uninterruptedly from 1945 to 1953. In 1943–1944, notwithstanding his statements about democracy's good qualities, he remained extremely cool toward democratic ideals in his writings concerning the Catholic Party's programmes.[73]

Indeed, the ecclesiastics themselves showed how difficult it was to expunge a past in which antidemocratic thought was so deeply ingrained. The Pope, by adopting an ultra-cautious attitude toward the democracy issue in his famous Christmas 1942 radio message, seemed

71 'La Carta del Lavoro,' *LCC*, II (1927), p. 385.
72 Review of P.M. Cordovani, O.P., *Cattolicismo e idealismo*, Milan 1928, in *LCC*, III (1928), p. 54.
73 See P.G. Zunino, 'Comunisti cattolici di fronte alla democrazia tra crisi del fascismo e repubblica,' in A. Agosti (ed.), *Togliatti e la fondazione dello stato democratico*, Milan 1986, p. 162.

to hint at the existence of a mysterious threat. There was widespread bafflement as to what he had really meant, and leading representatives of the Catholic intelligentsia, including several who would become ministers and high-ranking personalities in the future democratic Italy (such as Fanfani, Vito, Balladore-Pallieri and Saraceno), met to interpret the Vatican text. But the dilemma — whether the Pope's words really 'contained an implicit condemnation of dictatorships and an invitation to promote democratic forms of politics' — remained unresolved. Finally, with so many eminent Catholic personalities expressing 'not ... unanimous opinions' on the subject, Father Gemelli wrote to the Pope asking for a definitive clarification. But the Secretary of State (using a turn of phrase redolent with the wisdom of the Curia) replied by advising an 'extremely cautious and reserved attitude,' indicating that even the Vatican was uncertain which path to follow. It was only two years later, in his Christmas message of 1944, that the Pope finally gave his blessing to democracy, noting that 'to many the democratic form of government seems to be a natural postulate.'[74] Thus did the ship of Catholic thought, and those elements of society that lay under its influence and control, sail finally into the port of democracy — albeit not in triumphant style.

Moreover, the final leg of that journey was fraught with obstacles. As late as 1946, there were still some notable intellectuals of the Gemelli school who were willing to accept the idea of democracy only if the government were entrusted to 'the few, the best and the wisest,' and not to the majority, which 'is always made up of the lowest classes, the incompetent and the ignorant.'[75] Thus, Deputy Secretary of State Tardini penned a memorandum to Roosevelt acknowledging the need for a return to democracy in Italy, but adding that 'democratic forms' should be 'adapted to meet the country's ability, characteristics and level of development.' It would be a mistake, he concluded, 'to apply to Italy the same methods and criteria that have been so successful in England and America.'[76] This was just one step removed from one of the traditional reductive formulas for democracy that we have already discussed: implicit in the desire to specify what type of democracy was feasible in Italy was a denial of its viability. Although this was never made explicit, such reservations provide a nucleus for

74 On these questions see *ibid.*, pp. 162–164, and P. Pombeni, *Il gruppo dossettiano e la fondazione della democrazia italiana (1938–1948)*, Bologna 1979, p. 117.

75 P. Pombeni, *Il gruppo dossettiano* (above, note 74), p. 215.

76 December 1943, in E. di Nolfo (ed.), *Vaticano e Stati Uniti 1939–1952: Dalle carte di Myron C. Taylor*, Milan 1978, p. 282.

the idea of a 'protected democracy,' a notion coined in the last and least memorable of De Gasperi's years as Prime Minister. Once again, Italian politicians seemed hesitant to pronounce the word democracy without any restrictive qualifications.

<div align="center">v</div>

We turn now to the most revealing and, in many ways, the most disconcerting aspect of our discussion. It concerns the convergence of ideas that emanated from different sections of Italian policy to contribute to a distrust of democracy. For it was not only Catholic thinkers or radical intellectuals like Gobetti and Salvemini, nor only the far left (which has not been considered in this paper), on the one hand, and the supporters of authoritarian nationalism, on the other, whose diatribes eroded Italy's parliamentary system. The revolt against liberal democracy arose within moderate liberal circles as well. The contribution (practical, theoretical or both) of certain figures was crucial to the fall of democracy; that these figures were not only an integral part of the political system but in some cases its very symbols is the most dramatic and perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of our subject. To put it bluntly, it cannot be denied that the antiliberal revolt was partly a self-destructive impulse, a sort of rebellion of the liberal world against itself. I hasten to add that this process was only marginally fomented by deliberate choices; more often than not it was the result of errors of judgement or of inchoate conservative leanings which in less heated times would not have caused irreparable damage. In practice, however, an array of omissions and commissions contributed decisively to undermining from within a fortress that was already under siege by multifarious forces from without.

Already toward the end of the nineteenth century, liberal political culture had entertained serious doubts about the truth of some of the basic principles of liberal democracy and the feasibility of their application. Eminent personalities from the ruling class, such as Minghetti, Bonghi and Jacini, not to mention theorists of elitism such as Pareto and Mosca, all struck up the theme of the 'decadence of the parliamentary regime.'[77] Thirty years later, that 'decadence' had metamorphosed into a genuine collapse in which leading lights of the liberal world, such as Giolitti, former Premier Salandra and Luigi

77 Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo* (above, note 1), p. 120.

Albertini, editor of *Corriere della Sera*, northern Italy's most important bourgeois newspaper, played a major role.

Between 1924 and 1926, all of these men, to a greater or lesser degree, would have their eyes opened to the disaster that had occurred: 'The times are cruel,' a *commis d'Etat* would confess to his friend, Giolitti.[78] Not long before, Albertini had expressed his dejection over the decline of a country peopled by 'cynics.'[79] And in January 1925, Salandra issued a declaration in which he openly took sides against Fascism.[80] But all of them, along with Senator Ruffini, former Premier Nitti and economist Luigi Einaudi — another leading figure in liberal circles, a senator and future president of the republic — had previously shown a vacillating and appeasing attitude toward Fascism.

The most representative case was certainly that of Giolitti, who was obsessed by the fear of the 'civil war' that he saw as looming on the horizon — when in fact it was already under way.[81] In the name of 'pacification,'[82] he not only opened the doors of parliament to the Fascists, but continued to preach a benevolent wait-and-see approach, even after the March on Rome, in the belief that Fascism would undergo a pacific evolution. He was to go even further. When Mussolini came to power he declared: 'The country needs a strong government [...], Italian politics needs new blood, new strength.'[83] As the parliamentary structure crumbled, the harshest word the grand old man of Italian liberalism could find to describe the Duce's exploitation of parliamentary institutions was 'unusual.'[84] Until late 1924, Giolitti was still appealing for 'maximum prudence on all sides.'[85] This attitude was encapsulated in his obsessive reiteration, 'Patience, patience, patience.'[86] In the midst of the crisis that followed Matteotti's murder,

78 Giustino Fortunato to Giolitti, 23 June 1927, in *Dalle carte di Giovanni Giolitti: Quarant'anni di politica italiana*, III: *Dai prodomi della grande guerra al fascismo, 1910–1928* (ed. C. Pavone), Milan 1962, p. 442.

79 Albertini to Einaudi, 30 July 1924, in L. Albertini, *Epistolario, 1911–1926* (ed. Ottavio Barié), IV, Milan 1968, p. 1789.

80 See the speech by former prime minister Antonio Salandra, 16 January 1925, in 'La dichiarazione di Salandra,' *La Stampa*, 17 January 1925.

81 Giolitti to Olindo Malagodi, 20 July 1922, in Giolitti, *Discorsi extraparlamentari*, Turin 1952, pp. 334–335.

82 See Giolitti's speech of 26 June 1921, in idem, *Discorsi parlamentari*, IV, Rome 1956, p. 1872.

83 See N. Valeri, *Da Giolitti a Mussolini*, Milan 1967, p. 373.

84 Speech by Giolitti, 16 March 1924, in Giolitti, *Discorsi parlamentari*, p. 1899.

85 Giolitti to Camillo Corradini, 29 June 1924, in G. De Rosa, *Giolitti e il fascismo in alcune sue lettere inedite*, Rome 1957, p. 24.

86 Giolitti to Corradini, 1 April 1924, in *ibid.*, p. 23; see also F. Ruffini to Albertini, in Albertini, *Epistolario* (above, note 79), p. 1691.

he wrote in a letter to a faithful follower (and he was certainly not referring only to local color): 'It's so nice to be in the country!'[87] In other words: let us wait for the storm to pass, as pass it will, but in the meantime let us find a good shelter.

An identical outlook is clearly discernible in the correspondence of the Albertini brothers, two of the most influential personalities in contemporary liberal circles. Here we find the editor of *Corriere della Sera* sounding what had become something of a motto for liberalism perched on the brink of the abyss: 'Let time take its course.'[88] The same Albertini who, before the March on Rome, had advised 'calling in the Fascists to prove their ability to govern,'[89] had only this to say in the aftermath of the Blackshirts' assault on the central power: 'We are critical, but without anger.'[90] A few weeks later he would add: 'We fervently desire the Right Honorable Mussolini to restore the exterior and interior of our building and the spirit of its occupants.'[91]

The part played by circumstance and events in shaping the destiny of Italian parliamentary democracy is well known, but it does not entirely explain the relationship between Italian conservative liberalism and the rise of Fascism. There was also a theoretical aspect, integral to the political culture of that school, wherein we discern a yielding of liberal thought at the ideological level.

Once more, the spectre of Bolshevism was a key element in this process of erosion, inducing leading liberal personalities to cast aside (only temporarily, they said) certain fundamental principles of liberal thought and behaviour. Thus, the gifted scholar and senator Francesco Ruffini was confronted in 1923 with what he called a 'distressing dilemma': how to uphold his liberal convictions by taking sides openly against Fascism, while coping with the equally compelling need to mute his criticism for 'fear of worse things.'[92] In the same year, Francesco Saverio Nitti expressed the hope that Mussolini would hold onto power, as his fall would generate a 'situation of chaos.'[93] In one way or another, Salandra, Einaudi, Giolitti and Albertini, too, all shared these thoughts. They may have called themselves 'sons of liberty,'

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87 Giolitti to Corradini, 29 June 1924 (above, note 85).
88 Einaudi to Albertini, 30 August 1923, in Albertini, *Epistolario* (above, note 86), p. 750.
89 N. Valeri, *Da Giolitti a Mussolini* (above, note 83), p. 357.
90 Albertini to Einaudi, 31 October 1922, in Albertini, *Epistolario* (above, note 79), p. 1642.
91 See O. Barié, *Luigi Albertini*, Torino, 1972, p. 487.
92 Ruffini to Albertini, June 1923, in Albertini, *Epistolario* (above, note 86), p. 1724.
93 F.S. Nitti to Albertini, 8 January 1923, in Albertini, *Epistolario* (above, note 86), p. 1682.

in Albertini's words,[94] but they recognized as well that Fascism had 'saved Italy from the Socialist danger.'[95]

On the whole, their criticism was focused on and limited to the concrete actions of Mussolini and his followers. They agreed fully with the Fascist leaders about the need to restore order and reassert authority, but they questioned the methods. It was unreasonable, they felt, for the Fascist government to continue on the road of illegality once the enemy had been routed. But precisely this apparently simple and reasoned distinction caused a mortal breach in their liberal principles. It is clear, upon reflection, that the impossible attempt to separate 'method' from 'substance' brought about the collapse of the entire idealistic and institutional framework of liberal democracy. These thinkers failed to envision the consequences that would ensue if they broke the inseparable link between principles and practice, even for the purpose of warding off the 'Red peril.' Form and content, means and ends, had been indissoluble in liberal democratic thought; every compromise on methods entailed a compromise of principles, and vice versa. The principles of liberty went hand in hand with the methods of legality. The breach caused by the very assent to illegal violence, given in order to save the country from revolutionary upheaval, could not be mended when the danger had passed.

That the liberals had entered a blind alley is shown in Albertini's dramatic appeal of May 1923 to Ruffini. 'We can compromise on everything,' Albertini wrote in his letter, 'we can remain silent on many things which we should criticize bitterly; we can praise everything that it is possible to praise, even overdoing the point. ... But there is one area where we do not compromise and where we cannot compromise, and that concerns the regime and its integrity. In the defence of essential liberties, of the constitution and of parliament, we believe it is neither legitimate nor honest to compromise and be guided by other motives.'[96] One is hard put to imagine how those 'essential liberties' were defined and where they could be found. For two years before the Fascists came to power, their squads were on the rampage all over Italy. Although Albertini did not elaborate, it is safe to say that the liberties he had in mind were to be applied in a limited way and did not extend to the political and social forces that flew the red banner. On the contrary,

94 *Corriere della Sera*, 26 November 1923.
95 Speech by Albertini in the Senate, 26 November 1922, in N. Valeri, *Da Giolitti a Mussolini* (above, note 83), p. 205.
96 Albertini to Ruffini, 22 May 1923, in Albertini, *Epistolario* (above, note 86), pp. 1717–1718.

extraordinary methods, including the scrapping of constitutional limits, were demanded to rebuff the 'alien enemies' who, like the barbarian hordes, had clandestinely infiltrated the country.

But what these weary supporters of liberal democracy failed to acknowledge was that it was not the legitimate forces of the state that were acting to repel Bolshevik barbarism, but a private militia, operating illegally. In tacitly assenting to the purging of the country's bothersome left wing by an illegal force, the liberal leadership allowed legality to be contaminated irrevocably. By giving the Fascist squads what amounted to immunity, the civil leadership effectively legitimized violence, which, once unleashed, was not easily contained, and at the same time it delegitimized the parliamentary system. Not even the firm stance some of those liberals took when they saw, to their horror, that Fascism would stop at nothing, not even at murdering a member of parliament, was of any avail. Liberal democracy in Italy was now a thing of the past.

vi

This survey of the structural weaknesses that undermined liberal-democratic thought in Italy between 1920 and 1940 would not be complete without a consideration, however brief, of a complex subject that from many points of view is central to the history of the relationship between culture and democracy in twentieth-century Europe — namely, the philosopher Benedetto Croce and his attitude toward Fascism. This topic, although hardly new, has yet to be dealt with in depth; most treatments concentrate on the variously motivated denunciations voiced immediately after Croce's death.[97] I shall focus primarily on the 1920s, the period which I believe represents the crucial passage in the evolution of Croce's attitude toward Fascism.

Of all of Croce's published works, we can point to a single representative text, published at a critical moment, as the one most fitting to serve as the basis for our analysis. In May 1924 Croce published an article in the review *La Critica*; it was later reprinted in the Turin daily *La Stampa*, where it gained a wider audience. The background was

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97 On Croce and Fascism see E. Garin, *Cronache di filosofia italiana (1900–1943)*, Bari 1955, Chap. 8; M. Abbate, *La filosofia di Benedetto Croce e la crisi della società italiana*, Torino 1955; S. Zeppi, *Il pensiero politico dell'idealismo italiano e il nazionalfascismo*, Florence 1973; G. Sasso, *Per invigilare me stesso: I taccuini di lavoro di Benedetto Croce*, Bologna 1989; D. M. Smith, 'Benedetto Croce: History and Politics,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, I (1973), pp. 41–61.

the elections held in the spring of 1924, in an atmosphere of conflicting pressures and political violence. The article appeared shortly after the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti's denunciation in parliament of the lawlessness and intimidations that had prejudiced the vote, and shortly before his abduction and murder by a gang of Fascists. Croce, after identifying Fascism with futurism, a cultural disposition he had attacked sharply, wrote:

> My denials, like those of any reasonable man, are always *secundum quid* [according to the circumstances], and do not exclude the concept that what is reprehensible on one occasion may be admirable on another, that what is not valid for certain purposes may be valid for others. I denied that futurism, a volitive, collective, brash movement that plays to the crowds, could bring about poetry — which is produced by rare, contemplative and lonely spirits, in silence and away from the limelight; but I did not deny — just the contrary, I recognized — the practical character of the futurist movement. Writing poetry is one thing and coming to blows is another. I think that it is not to be excluded that he who does not succeed in the first should not do well in the second. Moreover, in certain cases the shower of blows may be usefully and rightly administered.[98]

These words deserve to be engraved in the tormented history of Italian democracy. Upon rereading them, one is shocked again by the realization that they expressed an undisguised blessing of the violence of the Fascist squads, of the fist and the club, given by a man who, despite all, remains one of twentieth-century Europe's cultural giants. At the same time, we may also point to them as, if not the watershed, then at least the maximum point reached by Croce in his lucid and implacable opposition to democracy. Henceforth, we find the germination (albeit not without several reversals) of that 'religion of liberty' that would illuminate his later life. As Stuart Hughes has pointed out, even during the years of dictatorship the word 'democracy' continued to stick in his throat. 1924 is essential to our understanding of the true heart of the antidemocratic revolt, of which Croce was a principal standard-bearer, and equally so to our understanding of the crisis that was affecting the ideology of that revolt and the consequent revival of liberal-democratic values, in which Croce, once again, was

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98 B. Croce, 'Fatti politici e interpretazioni storiche,' *La Critica*, 1924, pp. 190–191 (reprinted in idem, *Cultura e vita morale*, Bari 1926, pp. 265–271).

among the leading figures. Paradoxically, indeed, Croce's influence was considerable both upon the opponents of democracy and upon those of the Fascist dictatorship.

Croce arrived at that 1924 vortex following two decades of trenchant criticism of democracy and illuminism, a campaign waged day after day in a cultural and political environment that was increasingly willing to accept judgements such as this one of 1915, quoted by Croce from a French writer: 'La Démocratie c'est le néant! C'est le troupeau conduisant le berger, c'est le monde renversé, c'est le désordre, l'inanité et l'imbecillité organisée.'[99] In large measure, Croce had formulated and refined his political categories on the basis of such ideas; his motto, 'against the eighteenth century,' well expressed the thrust of his intellectual criticism.[100] His historical vision, which was everywhere validated, was dominated by the idea, in his words, that 'life is a struggle, and a pitiless struggle.'[101] At the same time, certain things — humanitarian 'preconceptions' or illuminist 'chatter,' as he called them on different occasions — presented insidious obstacles to making history.[102]

This line of thought attached little importance to the individual. Paraphrasing the text quoted above, we might say that the individual, too, was 'néant' — a small, insignificant chip, the inert material with which history paved its way. Individuals dissolved into the 'spiritual universe,' and in the sea of time to which the 'fleeting individuality'[103] belonged, the only right course was to entrust oneself to the current's flow. But the outcome was not always felicitous, for history, as Croce wrote in his fundamental autobiographical essay, 'is entitled to drag along and crush individuals.'[104]

It is in the Latin expression *secundum quid* that we find the essential nucleus of Croce's image of Fascism; here the constituent elements of the antidemocratic side of his thought are condensed. What Croce meant by the phrase was that his judgement on Fascism had to be measured (like any appraisal of political reality) against the concrete conditions of the moment. Fascism, that is, could be a useful antidote to Socialism, and that was certainly a good thing; but his judgement

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99 Idem, *Pagine sulla guerra* (1915), Bari 1928[2], p. 66.

100 *Ibid.* (1916), p. 107.

101 *Ibid.* (1912), p. 30.

102 *Ibid.* (1916), p. 105; idem, 'Prefazione' (1912) to *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica*, Bari 1968, p. xiv.

103 B. Croce, *Contributo alla critica di me stesso* (1915), Milan 1989, p. 12.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

would be very different if the Fascist movement aspired to incarnate a cultural vision or, worse still, to harbour a moral perspective. In other words, to Croce politics was one thing, moral conscience quite another; the latter belonged to a sphere where nothing could be overlooked, but in politics the ends could well justify the means. History, as he had written in 1916, always had to resort to the 'rabble' and to evil methods — as necessary to government as 'females' of ill repute were to society.[105]

By May 1924 Croce probably had recognized that the Blackshirts were a band of thugs, but he concluded that history's unfathomable paths would render further discussion useless. The motley crowd of desperadoes who were combing the countryside, ravaging, humiliating and killing, were like messengers sent by God to restore order — certainly not a task suited to delicate minds and gentle spirits. We should recall, though, that the conservative foundations upon which Croce's thought rested always ensured that the Red rabble would never be given the benefit of a similar impassive historical providence. It was, after all, the Reds who had fomented the disorder that the country was suffering. Communistic Socialism was an expression of the most reprehensible form of class violence, from which history would never be able to squeeze anything good. The far left, with due exceptions, was certainly to be associated with the darkest turns of human events. As Croce was to write in the full swing of the Fascist rise to power, one always had to seek a positive sign in history, because when all was said and done the devil was 'l'homme d'affaires du bon Dieu.'[106]

Crucial in determining Croce's attitude toward Fascism was his view that nothing in the political realm had an absolute value, while very few historical phenomena produced a totally negative outcome. If nothing was unchangeable, if there was no 'external code,' if everything shifted 'according to the time and place,'[107] inevitably there was room in history for Fascism too, Croce had to conclude in 1924. Similarly, and this, too, is an essential point in Croce's political thought, democracy had its place in history's silent flow, but it might, as Croce had preached for years, be a temporary place. At a time when Fascism had not yet emerged on the stage of history, had not revealed the full brunt of its

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105 B. Croce, 'Lo spirito sano e lo spirito malato' (1915), in *Etica e politica*, Bari 1981, p. 49.

106 Idem, 'La concezione liberale come concezione della vita' (1928), in *Etica e politica* (above, note 105), p. 241.

107 Idem, *Filosofia della pratica* (1908), Bari 1945, p. 326.

devastating power, democracy seemed to Croce at most a possibility, or, rather, one of several options. But had he not written, in 1915, that events were never good or bad, favourable or unfavourable, but merely conditions for further actions?[108] The denial of democracy was the hallmark of his understanding of that ever-changing yet ever-identical reality. Human events always entailed the presence of 'the rulers and the ruled,' and Croce was convinced that nothing (or very little) lay beyond this basic truth. Thus, to cite a famous aphorism from a 1912 work by Croce, 'the party that governs or misgoverns is always the same.'[109] A little later he went on to say that 'political forms do not exist.'[110] Croce's lack of faith in the permanent substance of 'practical parties' and 'political forms'[111] would lead him to give equal weight (as 'conditioned and contingent beliefs') to 'monarchy' and 'republic,' 'free competition' and 'socialism,' 'state socialism' and 'union socialism.'[112]

This was the substance of his thinking on the subject before he set down the phrase *secundum quid.* But there was more to this historicism than Croce himself realized in the years of the rise of the dictatorship, and more than can be gleaned from a first reading of his writings of that period. It is not far-fetched to claim that the reasons for the historical legitimization of Fascism and the distant roots for its negation were both bound up in that *secundum quid.* Initially, then, both Fascism and anti-Fascism shared the same conceptual nucleus, and both were nourished by a historicism in which continuous change lived side by side with eternal immutability.

In any case, from the summer of 1924, despite the vote of confidence Mussolini's government received shortly after the Matteotti murder, thick clouds began to loom over the placid serenity with which Croce had welcomed Fascism. His 'great esteem for Mussolini,' reiterated several times after the March on Rome, and his hopes for a 'beneficial period of suspended freedom'[113] had proved incompatible with the events unleashed by a party which may have been no more than an 'empirical fact,' but which, nonetheless, seemed unwilling to restore normality. Writing to his friend Vossler in the summer of 1923, Croce

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108 Idem, 'I 'peccati di pensiero" (1915), in *Etica e Politica* (above, note 105), p. 17.
109 Idem, 'E' necessaria la democrazia?,' in *Pagine sparse*, Naples 1943, I, pp. 312–313.
110 Idem, *Pagine sulla guerra* (1918; above, note 99), p. 235.
111 *Ibid.* (1918), p. 269.
112 *Ibid.*
113 Croce to Ermenegildo Pistelli, 30 April 1923, in *Epistolario*, I: *Scelta di lettere curata dall'autore, 1914–1935*, Naples 1967, p. 99; see also Croce to Sebastiano Timpanaro, 5 June 1923, *ibid.*, p. 101.

had alluded to the advent of Fascism as a prospect that became feasible 'suddenly and unexpectedly in the events of the last few years,' adding that 'Italy, too, has its miracles.'[114] Within a year, the miracle became a nightmare. Croce had emphasized that Fascism should be only a 'bridge along the way' toward a 'stronger' liberal state, and that it could never mark the onset of a 'new historical era.'[115] Now he, too, was beginning to suspect that it was turning into something far different from the temporary collection of able dispensers of violence which he, along with many others, had taken it to be. Still, for some time he continued to hope that Fascism would not squander the 'benefits' already accrued by allowing a return of 'the sluggishness and inconclusiveness that had preceded it.'[116]

In that transitional period when hope and fear hung equally in the balance, Croce, too, expressed a fateful willingness to 'give the transformation process the time it needs' — the same sentiment which, as we saw, crossed the lips of many another illustrious liberal.[117] When, beginning in the second half of 1924, the catastrophe emerged in all its horrific magnitude, Croce embarked on that road (to be described here only briefly) which would lead him to become a conscientious opponent of the dictatorship. His anti-Fascist stance would develop in parallel with a fairly wide revision in several of the features of his thought. Nevertheless, the road had its twists and turns, and even though Croce edited the manifesto of the anti-Fascist intellectuals in 1925, and three years later brought out a history of Italy steeped in an anti-Fascist spirit, he did not in this period entirely discard the old image of Fascism or resolve the problem of democracy.

Stubbornly, Croce continued to maintain that the question of Fascism and democracy was confined to the realm of empirical facts and had nothing to do with such sweeping categories as 'freedom vs. duty,' 'good vs. evil' or 'true vs. false.' 'Those struggles,' he would say as late as 1925, referring to the events in the Italian political arena, were no more than

> struggles over the different ways of conceiving and desiring the social and political life. ... It is a question of one party that wants

114 Croce to Karl Vossler, 31 July 1923, in *Carteggio Croce-Vossler, 1899–1949*, Bari 1983, p. 308.
115 Interview in *Giornale d'italia*, 10 July 1924, in *Pagine sparse* (above, note 109), II, p. 483.
116 *Ibid.*, p. 484.
117 *Ibid.*, p. 485.

the government to have a certain number and a certain kind of powers, and another that wants the government to have less, and of a different kind. ... Nothing more and nothing less than this.[118]

Philosophy was one thing, politics another. Any mixing of the two was dangerous because there were no 'parties of good and parties of evil, or parties of truth or of lies.' Reality, Croce held, was unitary, be it democracy or dictatorship; this is implicit in his statement that the Bourbon regime in Naples was also an 'assertion of God,' that is, a necessary fruit of history.[119] He would cling to this element of his thought — the need to oppose authoritarian government (as he maintained from 1924) but at the same time not to undermine the great judgemental categories — even after he had left Fascism behind.

For the present, after reaffirming that the new government was vulnerable because of the 'one-sidedness and superficiality of its culture as compared with liberalism,'[120] Croce preached the need, and the possibility, of 'saving history and salving our moral conscience.'[121] It was a formula that again reflected the splendour and intensity of Croce's thought, but what did it denote?

For Croce, 'saving history' could mean only one thing: imbuing it with significance, endowing it with a sense beyond the incomprehensibility of events whose meaning might not immediately be decipherable. As a traveller hesitates before crossing uncharted, dark territory, so from a certain moment Fascism must have seemed unknowable and unfathomable to Croce. Undeniably, though, the same territories today cloaked in darkness might be illuminated tomorrow by the light of historical reason. Once history had recognized 'the reasons for what had happened,'[122] Fascism, too, could be understood in 'terms of the good.'[123] From this point of view, not even Fascism could be thrown onto the trash heap as though it had been an 'irrational and arbitrary phenomenon.'[124] To do so would irremediably lacerate the unitary and organic weave of history, which could not exclude Fascism without itself disintegrating. If, as Croce wrote in a memorable

118 B. Croce, 'Libertà e dovere' (1925), in *Cultura e vita morale: Intermezzi polemici*, Bari 1955³, pp. 303–305.
119 *Ibid.*, p. 304.
120 B. Croce, 'Liberalismo' (1925), in *Cultura* (above, note 118), p. 287.
121 Croce to Giovanni Ansaldo, 20 February 1928, in *Epistolario* (above, note 113), I, p. 145.
122 Croce to Fortunato, 12 February 1928, in *ibid.*, p. 143.
123 Croce to Ansaldo, 20 February 1928, in *ibid.*, p. 145.
124 *Ibid.*

passage, inquisitors and defendants, executioners and victims were always incorporated in the needs of history, then Fascism, too, was destined to occupy a considerable place in the overall economy of the historical event. In 1928, Croce still stood by what he had written twenty years earlier, namely, that 'everyone struggled as he could and as he had to' and that on the historical plane everyone would be wrong, and everyone would be right.[125]

As for the need to salvage our 'moral conscience,' here 'reality' imposed nothing. Moral conscience had to be judged in terms of itself alone, the criterion being solely how it fulfilled 'its mission' and its 'internal calling.' Fighting Fascism by denying it intrinsic need and 'intangibility'[126] was the way to achieve that 'salvation of the moral conscience' that Croce had spoken about. His ideas on dictatorship and democracy developed in the second half of the 1920s within the framework of the clear distinction he drew between moral conscience and historical understanding. It was a conceptual evolution that showed just how much ground had been covered since the days when he gave his full backing to Fascism, but also revealed how much internal instability was entailed in that drastic distinction between a Fascism that was negative from the ethical and political standpoint but positive from the historical standpoint.

An analysis of Croce's judgement of Fascism following the fall of the dictatorship is outside the chronological scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that after spending twenty years living like a 'lost sentinel'[127] in the desert of dictatorship, Croce would abandon many of his earlier premises to articulate a different and less relativistic conception of the relationship between democracy and dictatorship. Fascism having fallen, he could not and would not transmute it into something that made in any way for the good.

But in the years 1943–1944 the issue of 'saving history and salvaging our moral conscience' would resurface: how to save a history which, tainted with events as unspeakable as they were incomprehensible, had again shown what a deceptive illusion it was to think that a sense could be read into it. The events of the 1930s and 1940s had rendered it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to decipher the signs of the unveiling of the 'spirit of the world' on its enigmatic and terrible

125 B. Croce, 'La libertà di coscienza e di scienza' (1909), in *Cultura* (above, note 118), p. 99.
126 Croce to Ansaldo (above, note 123).
127 Croce to Vossler, 24 November 1932, in *Carteggio* (above, note 114), p. 355.

course. Even the attempt to understand Fascism would have put the possibility of believing in the rationale of history at risk. Instead, the salvation of a country that had been totally immersed in Fascism was to be achieved by expunging Fascism from the collective Italian past, as though by the waving of a magic wand which, along with history, would bring about the restoration of a society that for a generation had allowed a handful of anti-Fascists to salve its conscience. Erasing Fascism meant extending that conscience to many others, now said to have supported the dictatorship only in appearance.

Finally, Croce's famous writings of 1943–1944 may be considered an impulse toward the ideal, moral redemption paralleling the practical, material example that the Allied armies were then providing. The erasure of Fascism, in any event, expressed the categorical rejection of any future antidemocratic initiatives. Democracy and history would no longer be connected incidentally, and still less would they be opposed. From the 1930s, Croce was to say, history was the history of freedom; from that perspective it would be very difficult to find a place for Fascism, either on the streets or, he hoped, in the history books.

vii

The multifarious expressions of antidemocratic tendencies considered here show how powerful and consistent was the stream leading to dictatorship. Sweeping in its current feelings and attitudes rooted in a wide spectrum of intellectual realms, the antidemocratic surge became a flood that toppled every barrier. From this point of view, Croce's image of Fascism as a 'parenthesis' should be turned upside down. Not only was the Fascist regime far less flimsy than traditional interpretation has claimed, but antidemocratic tendencies seem to be a constant element of the Italian collective landscape. Democracy, while itself not exactly a parenthesis, has always been an extremely weak plant there. An overview of the century and more of Italy's existence as a state reveals a virtually unbroken attempt to erode the basis of the democratic system. We have tried to elucidate this process from a cultural and intellectual perspective with regard to a brief period. But had we looked beyond it, and had we considered the question from a larger social and institutional perspective, these subsurface tendencies would have been apparent elsewhere as well.

Before Fascism, a narrow and often blind ruling class dominated a weak society and a state without a solid foundation. Contemporary chronicles describe a country always about to spin out of the democratic

orbit. After Fascism, on the other hand, a political system which has brought the same ruling parties to power uninterruptedly for forty-five years has evinced a reality in which the democratic thread, though not broken, has been seriously endangered on several occasions. Right-wing nostalgia for a non-democratic past; antidemocratic hankerings on the part of certain leftist groups; and in the background, the growing power of criminal organizations which control large areas of southern Italy: these are the insidious and persistent underlying causes of a weak democratic ethos. Thus, all the elements we have considered, from past and present alike, allow us to conclude that the issue of democracy cannot be confined to the Fascist question. Antidemocracy was not born with the rise of Fascism, just as it did not die with the collapse of the dictatorship. The struggle for democracy, in Italy and elsewhere, continues.

Mario Sznajder

Giuseppe Prezzolini and the Quest
for a New Italy

Giuseppe Prezzolini, autodidact, prolific journalist, publicist and writer, was one Italy's major cultural figures in this century. During his prodigiously long life — he was born in Perugia in 1882 and died in Lugano in 1982 — he saw his beloved country undergo profound changes. With sadness, pessimism and sometimes humour, he documented, analyzed and criticized the major trends and events of his time.

At the outset of his career, Prezzolini collaborated in Corradini's *Il regno* (1903–1905), the first modern nationalist review in Italy. He edited *Il Leonardo* in Florence from 1903 to 1907 with Giovanni Papini, who became his lifelong friend. In 1908 Prezzolini began publishing *La voce*, which rapidly became a forum for the most important and controversial Italian intellectuals of the time. Croce, Gentile, Salvemini, Amendola, Einaudi, Nitti, Pareto, Michels, Lanzillo and Mussolini were only a few of the contributors in the realms of society and politics. Edited by Prezzolini until 1913, *La voce* addressed the most controversial issues of the day: the *Mezzogiorno*, education, nationalism, emigration and economic protectionism, along with philosophy, literature, music, painting and sculpture.

Prezzolini's brand of nationalism led him to espouse interventionism in 1914. The following year he was Rome correspondent for Mussolini's *Il popolo d'Italia*. After serving as a combat officer in the Italian army, he was transferred to training duties and then to the Historical Division of the Mobilization Office, which had begun to deal with psychological warfare and political propaganda.

After World War I, Prezzolini became a correspondent for the Foreign Press Service in Italy and also wrote for various Italian newspapers. He visited the United States for the first time in 1923, and in 1925 was chosen to head the Press Section of the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations. Gladly accepting his new post,

Prezzolini went to Paris, where he worked until his move to America in 1929. His lengthy American period included teaching positions at Harvard and later at Columbia. In 1962 he moved for the last time, to Lugano.[1]

Prezzolini wrote numerous articles, essays and books on a wide range of subjects. This paper focusses on his political and social criticism, which place him within the framework of the revolt of many contemporary European intellectuals against liberal democracy. We shall describe, first of all, the realistic idealism, characterized by vigorous criticism of Italian-style liberal democracy, which led Prezzolini to advocate nationalism. Prezzolini's view of the intellectual's role in politics was a corollary of this outlook. In the second part of this discussion, I shall dwell on Prezzolini's critique of Italian society and of the Italians, including his vision of an ideal new Italy, as reflected through the prism of his attitude towards war. In conclusion, I shall assess Prezzolini's place as a critic of his people and country, and of liberal democracy.

Although Prezzolini produced no single major work of a specifically political character, his writings contain numerous political comments and observations. The unifying theme of Prezzolini's political thought is what Emilio Gentile has called 'militant idealism,' a combination of philosophical idealism, broad realism and political concretism,[2] tied together by a perceived need for moral renewal.

Prezzolini expressed a clear antipositivism that linked him, while he was still publishing *Il Leonardo* with Papini, to the most important Italian intellectuals of the period:

> In common with Croce and Gentile (whom we had not yet read) there was nothing for us but the idealistic revolt, and the feeling of tiredness and intolerance for Italian positivism in particular and its global version in general.[3]

1 The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes: *Diario 1900–1941* = *Giuseppe Prezzolini — Diario 1900–1941*, Milan 1978; 'Io credo' = G. Prezzolini, 'Io credo,' in *Il meglio; Le fascisme* = idem, *Le fascisme*, Paris 1925; *Il meglio* = *Il meglio di Giuseppe Prezzolini*, Milan 1971; *Teoria sindacalista* = idem, *La teoria sindacalista*, Naples 1909; *La voce* = idem, *La voce 1908–1913*, Milan 1974.

   Biographical data about Prezzolini appear in his 'A modo di prefazione,' *Il meglio*, pp. 27–31; in his *Diario 1900-1941*; and in *Giuseppe Prezzolini — Diario 1942–1968*, Milan 1980.
2 E. Gentile, *La voce e l'età giolittiana*, Milan 1972, p. 203; idem, 'Fortuna de *La voce*,' in *La voce*, p. 936.
3 G. Prezzolini, *L'italiano inutile*, Milan 1953, pp. 140–141.

Prezzolini described Croce's antipositivism as a critique of every kind of naturalism and, primarily, as a reaction to the historical mistakes and ignorance of the positivists. Affiliating himself with this antipositivist trend, Prezzolini outlined its different forms. In France it was psychological and spiritualist in character, in the Anglo-Saxon countries Hegelian and theistic, and in Italy historicist.[4] Prezzolini declared himself in favour of reality and concrete facts as against positivist abstractions. Human ethical and religious needs were more important than arbitrary hypotheses and metaphysical ideas, and their satisfaction could not be left to the morality of the majority or to the pseudo-religion of the Freemasons. For Prezzolini, who thought that mere ideas exercised only a minimal influence over the majority, modern mass politics was the realm of action. In concrete politics he found more greed, passion and fantasy than clear, rational ideas.[5] This antirationalistic view of politics went hand in hand with Prezzolini's deep mistrust of the rationalist intellectual, whom he termed a 'manufacturer of ideas for those that did not have them, a merchant of phrases, a salesman of genius, a provider of arguments.'[6] Such intellectuals, he said, were like prostitutes, providing 'the pleasure of intelligence without the risk of paternity.' Intellectualism was an exercise in futility.[7]

Yet Prezzolini was himself an intellectual who maintained close contact with his peers. Aware of this, he tried to redefine the role of the intellectual, especially in relation to politics. He believed that, in Italy, the purveyors of culture had a duty to concern themselves with political issues, in order to enrich the nation's political conscience. It was up to the intellectuals to forge a link between culture and politics, based on a wide, precise and competent analysis of key political issues. Thus, the most serious intellectuals would furnish the political level with all the necessary elements needed to form sound judgements.[8] The realm of politics would be left to the men of action, but intellectuals had a political task: to use their knowledge in order to clarify the different options open to the decision makers.

Prezzolini wanted to bring about a combination of clear thinking with clear politics. He defined this as *effetualità*, a mode in which every

4 Idem, *Benedetto Croce*, Naples 1909, pp. 8–9.
5 Idem, *L'Italia fragile*, Milan 1975, p. 54.
6 *Teoria sindacalista*, p. 89.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
8 Prezzolini, 'La politica de *La voce*,' *La voce*, pp. 719–721.

activity, be it poetry, painting, philosophy, ethics or politics, had to be directed toward its own ends.[9] There was no place for compromise, for half-baked truths. To obtain good results, energy and will had to be invested in every sphere of human activity. Closely linked were two more requisites: faith and discipline.

Prezzolini saw the best historical example of discipline in Catholicism, in which profound beliefs in a religious truth produced a unitary and purposeful vision of life.[10] He was certain that the contemporary disintegration of the old Catholic discipline would be followed by a new, secular combination of faith and discipline. Modern life, in order to overcome what he saw as the crisis of democracy in the secular state, had to create its own creed and posit it against the old religion. The modern state could and indeed had to be anticlerical, but it could not become antireligious, since, in order to survive, it had to develop its own transcendental belief.[11] Prezzolini viewed the transition to modernity as a spiritual revolution in which modern society had to create a new myth for itself. This revolution, this transformation of social beliefs, must precede political revolution. Politicians could later implement the ideas of philosophers and the lyricism of poets, and they could even infuse it all with religious enthusiasm. Thus, the *Risorgimento* was closely related to artistic romanticism and philosophical idealism. Every great social movement is idealistic by definition, and has its own philosophy and artistic vision. The idea implies a thrust toward a belief going beyond concrete facts and beyond the limits of a given society. Socialism thus referred to poverty as a universal phenomenon, like patriotism; neither was limited to a specific place. Idea, creed and aesthetics played a far more important role in such movements than did the material base on which they were founded.[12]

The antimaterialistic and antirationalistic themes incorporated in this idealistic vision of life and history set Prezzolini in a position

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9   Idem, 'La vita nazionale,' *La voce*, p. 649. For Talmon's interpretation of the 'cult of effectiveness' in Italy and its relation to Fascism see J.L. Talmon, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, London–Berkeley–Los Angeles 1981, p. 481.

10 'Io credo,' p. 208.

11 Prezzolini, 'Parole d'un uomo moderno (religione),' *La voce*, pp. 395–396. Prezzolini's line of argument in this article resembles the logic of Talmon's thesis on totalitarian democracy, if we replace creed with ideology. The principles of liberalism are rejected in favor of a tight set of beliefs serving social and national integration — or constituting the ideal framework of the totalitarian state as a replacement for the Catholic Church — and furnishing the myth that guides social and national destinies.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 400–401.

antagonistic to the political heritage of the French Revolution. Man, in his view, was driven more by faith than by reason. The rationalist analysis, seeking deterministic laws, had failed, and this explained the crisis of socialism. Writing on the theory of syndicalism, Prezzolini asserted that economic determinism was being abandoned in favour of vitalism, an expression of the workers' will to freedom, replacing the material basis of economic needs with the creation of a proletarian ethical conscience.[13] Prezzolini found in the French journal *Cahiers de la quinzaine*, edited by Charles Péguy, the sense of moral mission, seriousness and honesty demanded by intellectual labour. Prezzolini called the journal 'a school of character, an educational establishment of energy.'[14]

Prezzolini claimed that philosophical idealism translated into politics meant realism.[15] He found an expression of that realism in the works of Niccolo Machiavelli, the political genius of Florence, who asked himself not what would be the best government, but what would be the most suitable under the given circumstances.[16] This was related to Machiavelli's *virtú*, a concept which made him, in Prezzolini's eyes, a modern political philosopher. Machiavellian *virtú* was simply the human readiness to act, to confront events, the will to exercise power and move forward. In this sense it was a modern concept, opposing the quietism of Christianity. *Virtú* was 'an activity superior to good and evil.'[17] Prezzolini thought that an idealistic education induced a state of perpetual restlessness, of continuous mental progress, thrust and motion towards higher stages of humanity.[18] He found congenial the Crocean idea of a continuous search for liberty that conceived progress as the conquest of freedom. Human history was a heroic struggle for freedom that did not allow for truce or rest. Freedom itself was the crux of all ideals, which the individual and indeed the whole of humanity sought to attain.[19]

Prezzolini's brand of idealism, with its advocacy of *effetualità* and the cult of the concrete, rejected rhetoric in both art and politics. It claimed to search for the truth, identifying real problems — such as the *Mezzogiorno*, protectionism, the state of education, Rome's corruption —

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13 *Teoria sindacalista*, pp. 46, 52.
14 Prezzolini, 'I Cahiers de la quinzaine,' *La voce*, p. 564.
15 Idem, 'La vita nazionale,' *La voce*, p. 647.
16 Idem, *Vita de Niccolo Machiavelli fiorentino*, Milan 1927, pp. 201–202.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
18 'Io credo' p. 201.
19 Prezzolini, 'Educazione idealista,' *La voce*, p. 419.

and to provide concrete solutions. It was an anti-ideological idealism, undercutting the political formulae adduced by liberals, socialists, republicans and monarchists alike. Based on a strange blend of concretism and mysticism, it promised not only an accurate analysis of the situation and adequate solutions to the problems thus raised, but also the drive needed to implement them.[20] The aim was to accomplish a real revolution, to educate the people and create a new Italy with a more serious, honest and righteous way of life. This revitalized Italy would reject all false rhetoric and take a more serious view of the surrounding world, examining first its own vices and only afterward the faults of others. Prezzolini believed in a working Italy which would not promise what it could not deliver and would reconcile its plans to its possibilities, while sparing neither effort nor sacrifice to reach its defined goals. This fusion of thought and action would create a great new Italy, worthy of the finest of its people.[21]

Much work was required to bring about the new Italy. An active intellectual figure but never a politician, Prezzolini nevertheless understood the centrality of politics in the kind of revolution he sought. If the ideas were to come from people like himself, it was essential to establish a clear role for them in this process.

His great accusation against the Italian political class was that it had no faith, having replaced political creeds with rational political ideologies and programmes which lacked the elements that could make them workable and imbue them with the moral drive needed to transform them from mere words into action. Thus his statement, in 1910, that only the opportunists and the spineless still joined political parties.[22] He longed for the old socialist and Catholic groups, filled with ardor and fervour 'that seemed to announce a generation filled with faith.'[23] To redress this trend and fulfill their real role, the intellectuals needed to stress values, clinging above the political debate to the right idealist direction of thought.

As he wrote to Piero Gobetti in 1922, Prezzolini believed that intellectual criticism and programs derived from a discerning and penetrating analysis of reality had an influence upon the national political parties.[24] He saw the intellectuals as acting upon history

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20 Idem, 'L'annata 1912 e quello che la corrispondenza rivela,' *La voce*, pp. 201–202.
21 Idem, 'Einaudi,' *Il meglio*, p. 344.
22 Idem, 'Che fare?' *La voce*, p. 267.
23 *Ibid*.
24 Prezzolini, 'Per una società degli apoti,' *Il meglio*, p. 260. Gobetti published Prezzolini's letter in *Rivoluzione liberale* (28 September 1922).

rather than upon politics, in the sense that their analysis and advice laid the ground for effective long-term policies, while the politicians, in contrast, were continually preoccupied with daily interests, rhetoric and petty issues. This is a very aristocratic view of history, in which the intellectual elite sets cultural guidelines and theoretical premises that will be accepted by discerning politicians, who implement them in the form of long-term policies. Prezzolini was convinced that ideas propounded by the intellectuals were slowly filtering down to Italy's political parties and starting to exert an influence upon them, in some cases even appearing as their fighting slogans.[25] He pointed out elsewhere that Italy's level of disorganization created favourable opportunities for small but assertive minorities, faithful and unwilling to compromise, to conquer the country.[26]

Prezzolini's early career — what may be called the Italian period of his life, up to 1925 — provides many examples of the way he saw the relationship between idealist intellectuals and politics. Indeed, *Il Leonardo* and even more so *La voce* are models of intellectual-cultural directives for Italy's political class. But the ex-editor of *La voce* clearly opposed the direct participation of intellectuals in politics, even when they were his former colleagues and friends. Intellectuals might know more and therefore see things more clearly than politicians, but they lacked power and did not constitute a viable force. He was highly critical of Salvemini's efforts to enter the political arena and predicted their failure.[27] An academic versed in critique could barely agree with anyone, much less unite people to take action, which Prezzolini viewed as the very essence of politics. His advice to Salvemini was to write a history of Italy rather than pursue a foredoomed political career.[28] Years later, he would judge the *fouriusciti*, the anti-Fascist exiles, by the same criteria. They were guilty of not knowing how to make history, and in his opinion, 'whoever does not know how to make history should do as I do: observe it.'[29]

Prezzolini's idealistic vision of the relationship between culture and politics was deeply influenced by the leading intellectuals of his time,

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25 *Ibid.*, pp. 260–261. Since this article did not take a clear anti-Fascist stand, it was interpreted as furthering the Fascist cause, and Prezzolini was accused of a pro-Fascist approach.
26 *Diario 1900–1941*, 22 March 1915, p. 153.
27 *Ibid.*, 25 October 1916, p. 236.
28 *Ibid.*, 15 February 1921, p. 335.
29 *Ibid.*, 11 December 1928, p. 426.

those who had fomented the turn-of-the-century antipositivist cultural revolution. The writings of Benedetto Croce, Georges Sorel, Henri Bergson, Giovanni Gentile, Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, to mention only the most prominent, were his sources of inspiration. Prezzolini also admired the idealism and politics of Charles Maurras, citing him as an example of what could be achieved through the straightforward presentation of an ideal, even if it was absurd and impossible to realize.[30]

In Croce Prezzolini saw not only a philosopher of idealism but the complete intellectual, who could deal with literature as well as politics, economics as well as art, religion as well as history. The nation was indebted to the great Neapolitan intellect for inspiriting Italian culture and arousing the interest of wide sectors of society in the major issues he addressed.[31]

Croce had made the Italians study Hegel; he was proudly bourgeois, antidemocratic and a forthright opponent of Freemasonry. Prezzolini credited him with making Sorel's reputation in Italy. Thanks to Croce's influence and advice, Prezzolini wrote, the works of Sorel, the main theoretician of syndicalism, were being translated into Italian, and their success in Italy's learned circles was attributable to Croce's favourable opinion and clarifications.[32] Prezzolini devoted the second part of his book on syndicalist theory to an analysis of Sorel's ideas, comparing his syndicalism to Bergsonian philosophy.[33] Prezzolini's interpretation of Sorel was similar to that of the revolutionary syndicalist intellectuals and activists of his time in Italy. It was suffused with antisocialist and antiliberal political formulae — that is, antimaterialist and antipositivist philosophical formulae. This was a novel way to change modern society.

In Bergson, Prezzolini encountered a highly original, individualist thinker, full of new ideas.[34] Again, he was drawn to the antipositivist trend in Bergson, the thrust for spiritual freedom regardless of material

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30 Prezzolini, 'Io devo ...,' *La voce*, p. 389.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 390.
32 Prezzolini, *Benedetto Croce* (above, note 4), p. 25.
33 B. Somalvico, 'Georges Sorel et Giuseppe Prezzolini,' in J. Julliard & S. Sand (eds), *Georges Sorel et son temps*, Paris 1985, p. 301. Somalvico claims that Prezzolini's linking of Sorel's syndicalism with the irrational and mystical elements in Bergson's philosophy was naive, and that it fed into a misinterpretation of Sorel's ideas in Italy, joining them to the ideological origins of Fascism. In my view, however, Sorel injected enough mythical and antirational elements into his *Reflexions sur la violence* as to need no help from Prezzolini to link him to Fascist ideology. See Z. Sternhell, M. Sznajder & M. Asheri, *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste*, Paris 1989, pp. 208–210.
34 Prezzolini, 'Bergson,' *Il meglio*, p. 328.

constraints. Comparing Bergson and Croce, Prezzolini wrote that in the first he found war, departure and the individual; in the second, peace, arrival and society.[35] But the difference lay in their style and themes, not in the basic idealism which both shared.

Pareto and Mosca taught Prezzolini the theory of aristocracies.[36] Prezzolini began espousing this as early as 1904, during his collaboration with Corradini in *Il regno*, and he expressed it again in *Vecchio e nuovo nazionalismo*, a collection of articles he published together with Papini in 1914.[37] By the time Prezzolini wrote *L'italiano inutile* (published in 1953), he recognized that Croce, Pareto and Sorel had demolished democracy with their theoretical criticism, and even more so by their profound moral contempt.[38] Prezzolini had played an active role in that process.

Prezzolini attacked each of the three main features of democracy: the idea of equality and the place of the masses in the modern state; the question of parliamentary representation; and the possibility of achieving a genuine liberalism.

Prezzolini simply did not believe that the masses were capable of participating democratically in politics, even when granted the power to govern themselves. He went even further, declaring that the masses do not know how to govern, do not want to govern, and do not understand governmental practice. They get rid of government when menaced by violence, corrupted by money, or simply in order to live a tranquil and secure life.[39] What the masses really want, more than universal suffrage, is their daily bread and a roof over their heads. To Prezzolini, the crowd was 'beastly, but excusable because of its ignorance'; its participation in politics led to the transformation of the *piazza* into a government institution, characterized by an ignorant and revolutionary bestiality.[40] This was not only a reflection of what he saw around him in Italy, but an attitude with profound roots in the period that preceded the rise of the Fascist regime. Prezzolini's elitism divided the world between the thinking minorities, cultural and political, and the more instinctive masses. He was well aware that intellectuals

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35 Idem, 'Io devo...' (above, note 30), p. 387.
36 Idem, 'Mosca and Pareto,' *Il meglio*, p. 354.
37 G. Papini & G. Prezzolini, *Vecchio e nuovo nazionalismo²*, Rome 1967 (first edition 1914), pp. 38–42.
38 Prezzolini, *L'italiano inutile* (above, note 3), p. 151.
39 *Diario 1900–1941*, 3 October 1930, p. 463.
40 *Ibid.*, 9 July 1919, p. 316.

like himself were unable to guide the masses, who were prone to manipulation by powerful interest groups. Such groups, organized to some extent in political parties, were too deeply involved in political action and manipulations to be able to offer a lucid analysis of the society in which they operated. As we have seen, Prezzolini hoped that a group of real intellectuals, detached from practical politics, could find ways to 'illuminate the intelligence and open the hearts of the best [politicians].' The distance between the intellectual elite and the masses meant that the intellectual's function was to mould and educate, not to act.[41]

Real political change, Prezzolini argued, could not be based on the masses. It was the bourgeoisie who provided the dreamers, the idealists, the people searching for solutions and change. In a process of renewal, the major role was played by the bourgeoisie, not the workers. Prezzolini pointed out in his critique of revolutionary syndicalism that the working class lacked the courage to adopt the syndicalist doctrine.[42] The masses were attached to the past, in this case to Christianity. Only minorities, possessing a superior *raison d'être*, would be able to fight for a place in modern society and for control of it.[43] The intervention of the masses in politics had brought disorder, corruption and a breakdown of discipline. But a return to the past was not feasible: the masses had entered the political arena to stay. Conservatism, looking to the old aristocracy for help, was an exercise in futility. Prezzolini felt that a new kind of state was needed.[44]

Under the rubric of democracy, he contended, the Italian state had in fact provided very little democratic content in the pre-Fascist period. Basic education was rudimentary, higher education the privilege of those who could afford it. Free competition between talented people existed only in theory; the system of competition for positions in the public administration was corrupt and deeply tainted with favouritism.

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41 Prezzolini, 'La vita nazionale,' *La voce*, p. 648.
42 *Teoria sindacalista*, pp. 203–205. A. De Grand has stated that 'Prezzolini sought a solution for Italy's ills in the revival of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class.' Prezzolini certainly was part of a group of bourgeois intellectuals who opposed the politics of Giovanni Giolitti, but their attitude toward the renewal of Italian political life was inspired by the idea of a spiritual revolution carried out by an elite. This elite did not have to be strictly bourgeois, as evidenced by Prezzolini's positive attitude toward revolutionary syndicalism; neither did it have to include all the bourgeoisie, as we see from his opposition to Giolittian liberalism. See A. De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association*, Lincoln, Nebraska–London 1978, p. 12.
43 Prezzolini, 'Parole' (above, note 11), p. 396.
44 'Io credo' p. 210.

Free trade had been abandoned in 1880. The masses were illiterate and ignorant. These issues were never discussed until the regime decreed universal male suffrage in 1913, but after World War I those same masses abused universal suffrage. The constitutional arrangements of the Statuto Albertino, dating from 1847, had never been popular. Parliamentarism was foreign to the Italian political tradition which had created the *comune* and the *signoria*, forms of government based on the family and paternalism, never on the masses. The *Risorgimento*, and with it the basic freedoms of press, assembly and religion, had been achieved relatively easily, with foreign help, but the agrarian classes, who constituted the majority of the population, had not participated in it.[45] This form of democracy was controlled by a small minority which manipulated the masses for its own purposes. Italian democracy, Prezzolini wrote, was vulgar and weak. The result was that democratic principles found no defenders among Italian intellectuals. Italy had produced no real democratic school, no great democratic book or personality. Italian youth had been inspired, since the beginning of the century, by the antidemocratic thought of Croce, Gentile, Pareto and other thinkers who proposed a realistic, socio-historical revision of the country's political life.[46]

In this context, the most interesting political trends of the pre-Fascist era were embodied in the antidemocratic movements, which proclaimed their belief in the individual and in the elitarian minorities. These included nationalism on the right and syndicalism on the left. Both rejected democratic and internationalist practices and, after World War I, espoused the preeminence of the nation. Prezzolini noted that President Wilson, with his weaknesses, was seen after the war as Italy's enemy, further contributing to the disgrace of democratic ideology because of his perceived image as a prophet of democracy.[47]

As Prezzolini saw it, all the evils of democracy were concentrated in the Italian parliament. Factionalism, political manipulation and the protection of particular interests produced a situation in which parliamentary votes were traded for ministerial favours. To make matters worse, the political fate of the whole country was controlled by Rome.[48] Prezzolini denounced Rome's unificatory rhetoric, urging greater regional autonomy, based on Italian historical precedent. He

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45 *Le fascisme*, pp. 72–73.
46 *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.
47 *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.
48 Prezzolini, 'Contro Roma,' *La voce*, pp. 759–760.

saw Rome and Milan as opposite poles of laziness and industriousness. Each city exemplified a certain morality: evil in the political capital, good in the industrial centre.

Italian parliamentarism had been an imitation of its British and French counterparts. It had worked somehow when there were only a few hundred thousand voters; but when the franchise was extended, enabling millions of illiterates to take part in the political process, confusion reigned in the Italian political system. The antidemocratic criticism of Pareto, Croce, Gentile, Sorel (who enjoyed a wider public in Italy than in France), Oriani and Papini had a profound impact on Italian society. The discredit of parliamentarism reached its height following World War I. Parliamentary deputies were seen not as defenders of liberty but as agents of corruption and favouritism. The parliament's inability to form an able, strong government eroded the last vestiges of its reputation. It was easy to understand, wrote Prezzolini, that not a single voter or deputy was willing to die in its defence.[49]

Prezzolini maintained that the Italian liberal democratic system was hopeless. In a 1910 discussion of the monarchic theories of Charles Maurras and the *Action française*, he declared that the Italian king could not produce the consolidating effect that the French nationalists thought a monarch might have upon their political system, because Vittorio Emanuele was not above political factionalism. According to Prezzolini, the king favoured the more disagreeable elements in the parliament — the Freemasons and Giolitti — while most Italians felt only indifference toward the crown.[50]

Italians were naturally antiliberal; they found it easier to understand governments that conceded freedom to certain groups than those that proclaimed freedom for all. To Prezzolini, the governments of Depretis, Crispi and Giolitti were more like dictatorships than liberal democracies. Moreover, Italian liberal democracy was as antiliberal in its economic protectionism as in every other sphere. Since liberal democracy was in effect a class regime, it had to be based, as in England, on an exchange: the governing class enjoyed privileges in return for the services it rendered to the country. In Italy, the privileges were appropriated but no services were rendered. Far from serving as

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49 *Le fascisme*, p. 243.
50 Prezzolini, 'Il re bloccardo,' *La voce*, pp. 633–634.

the country's guiding light, the governing class became a burden on Italian society. Most citizens therefore saw the state as an enemy.[51]

Prezzolini believed that liberalism was the political ideology of an aristocracy of knowledge and could function only where a tolerant, humane, intelligent and cultivated social class was dominant. This class had to operate beyond its own interests, guided by the most important of duties: to honour the truth. This was not the case in Italy. Moreover, liberalism bore within it a basic inner contradiction: since it recognized freedom of expression, it could not prohibit opposition to liberal principles once it reached power. To tolerate such opposition was to breed the seeds of its own destruction; not to do so was to act against its own principles, destroying itself from inside. To tolerate ideas while restricting antiliberal action was corrupting and ineffectual, a halfway, pointless stance.[52]

According to Prezzolini, liberalism had been brought to Italy by a number of Piedmont aristocrats seeking to emulate the British system. The transplanted version had undergone a process of caricaturization and Italianization, losing the character and effectiveness of the original. To survive, a liberal regime needed a strong state that would impose respect for freedom at any cost, and a political leadership willing, if necessary, to sacrifice its life for the sake of liberty. Prezzolini maintained that the former had never existed in Italy, while the latter dissolved rapidly after the *Risorgimento*. The intolerant and uneducated Italian masses were essentially antiliberal. Italian liberalism, lacking support from both above and below, degenerated and dissipated. Prezzolini concluded that liberalism could be reinstated only after the largest possible number of Italians had been educated politically and exposed to culture. It could then present itself as a total ideal, opposed to and replacing religion. Ultimately, however, it could only be the ideal of a select minority, an aristocracy that inspired respect and admiration.[53] In this regard, Prezzolini's ideas resembled those propounded by Piero Gobetti in *La rivoluzione liberale*.

Up to a point, Prezzolini's attack on Italian liberalism was similar to that of the nationalists and the revolutionary syndicalists, evoking a historicist vision that posited Italian traditions, political culture and socio-economic development as being antithetical to pure liberal

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51 Idem, 'Idea e compito del liberalismo in Italia,' *Il meglio*, p. 248. This article was originally published in the *Neue schweizerische Rundschau* in 1927.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 244–245.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 248–251.

principles. This produced a plausible explanation for the disintegration of the liberal-democratic regime in Italy. But his critique of liberalism went beyond the merely historical, transforming it, in the spirit of Crocean idealism, into an unattainable ideal. It was a utopia which could motivate human progress but lacked political viability as a practical ideology, or as the foundation for a party or regime. At the theoretical level, the problem with Prezzolini's brand of liberalism is that it was essentially aristocratic, contradicting the egalitarian principle of democracy. Wedded to democracy, it had to manifest political strength of an intensity that contradicted its innate tolerance. Then, to survive, it had to adopt a morality of sacrifice and heroism which ran counter to the basic rationalistic and hedonistic trends associated with economic liberalism. Prezzolini's ideal liberalism was very liberal for the aristocratic elite, less so for the majority.

Prezzolini was a nationalist, but his nationalism differed from Corradini's and from mainstream Italian nationalism. Despite his early collaboration with Corradini, he did not consider authoritarianism an end in itself.[54] During the general strike of 1904, Prezzolini sided with the workers. He saw in revolutionary syndicalism one of the most original modern socio-political doctrines, leading him to collaborate in *Il Divenire sociale* and, in 1909, to publish his book on *La teoria sindacalista*. From his point of view, the proletariat constituted an army, organized and educated as such in the syndicates, and functioning within the context of an 'armed social peace.'[55] The syndicalists' militant antimilitarism was counterposed to the false warrior ideal of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois were the first to shirk military service, Prezzolini stated, and the workers could hardly respect the contradiction between their declared militarism and their simultaneously cowardly attitude toward the military. The upshot was that the workers themselves became ardently antimilitaristic.[56]

That Prezzolini could be antisocialist but not antiproletarian is understandable in the context of his antimaterialism. Nationalists, too, could be extremely materialistic, expressing their ideals in terms of square kilometers of territory. He favoured Papini's spiritual nationalism, as reflected in the pages of *Il Leonardo*.[57] This was the

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54 J.J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1980, p. 92.
55 *Teoria sindacalista*, pp. 176–177.
56 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
57 Prezzolini, 'Codice di vita italiana,' *Il meglio*, p. 191; *La voce*, p. 24.

social and practical side of nationalism, lacking in rhetoric but dealing with the central problems of economics and culture. The spokesmen for this kind of nationalism, in both *Il regno* and *Il Leonardo*, were Papini and Prezzolini himself.[58]

There was a real and a false nationalism. The latter was mainly territorialist, materialistic and open to subversion by private interest; it was uncritical of Italy's performance and highly orotund, full of Roman eagles and Venetian lions. The new and genuine nationalism proclaimed by Prezzolini was eager to study the country's basic problems: the *Mezzogiorno*, education, and the attraction that the Italian cities of Trieste and Fiume exercised over the neighbouring Slovenians and Croatians. Modern nationalism could prepare the Italians for a better future in technological terms, and encourage honesty and industriousness. This was the nationalism of Cavour, who had imported modern machinery and better cows into Italy without invoking Julius Caesar and the legions.[59]

The drive for material improvement was one aspect of this new nationalism; the other was reaction to moral decay.[60] It was not the risk of a war with Austria, provoked by nationalist rhetoric, that led Prezzolini to consider false nationalism dangerous. On the contrary: war might bring sad consequences, but the effort and suffering it would demand of the Italians might lead to moral improvement and the development of a stronger national character. False nationalism was dangerous, rather, because its rhetoric and grandiloquence, its sheer vagueness, did not allow for serious discussion of the country's real problems. Regionalism, church-state relations, the problem of the South, the inadequacy of the educational system at all levels, the basic flaws in the Italian character, sexual relations — these were the subjects for the real nationalism, which Prezzolini and his colleagues were debating in their reviews and books. In the meantime, rhetorical nationalism busied itself with irredentism, bombastic imperialism and glorification of everything Italian, with never a hint of self-criticism.[61]

It was within the context of this realistic line of thought that Prezzolini and *La voce* took what was viewed as an antinationalistic stand in a 1911 series of articles opposing Italian intervention in Libya. His source was a report prepared by the Jewish Territorial Organization

58 Idem, 'Nel VII anniversario della nascita del "Regno",' *La voce*, p. 681.
59 Letter from Prezzolini to Alberto Caroncini, n.d. (1910?), *La voce*, p. 280.
60 Prezzolini, 'VII anniversario' (above, note 58), pp. 683–684.
61 Idem, 'Che fare?' (above, note 22), p. 268.

on Cyrenaica, which the Zionist leadership had considered leasing for Jewish immigration. A technical study drawn up by experts in agriculture and geology, it dealt with problems of cultivability and water resources and also contained data on ports, the population, roads and trade, yielding conclusions unfavourable to the possibility of large-scale immigration. Prezzolini and Salvemini pitted this report against the sources that the Banco di Roma and the Italian nationalists were using to further the idea of an Italian colonization of Libya, necessarily preceded by military conquest.[62] Basing his demonstration of the impracticability of intervention in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica on hard facts, Prezzolini drew a clear line between realistic and rhetorical nationalism.

Realism demanded a politics of facts and action. This conception lay at the root of Prezzolini's change in attitude toward Giolitti after the Libyan war. The staff of *La voce* and above all Salvemini, who called him the 'minister of gangsterism' (*il ministro della mala vita*), had fiercely attacked Giolitti and his policies. Prezzolini shared this attitude until Giolitti proved himself, from his point of view, as an *homme d'etat* by his decisions on the Libyan issue. Prezzolini depicted Giolitti as a politician of the school of realism with a rational intuition of real political forces, rejecting doctrinal abstractions and what he called 'democratic lies.'[63] Here again, the Machiavellian heritage surfaces in Prezzolini's writings. Ideas were for intellectuals; politicians were people of action. The subjection of politics to doctrines led to impotence. A realistic politician needed votes, the press, the masses.[64] In Prezzolini's eyes, Giolitti had proved himself master of that game by organizing the campaign in Libya and attaining a high level of domestic support, then dealing with the diplomatic aspects, leading the war against Turkey and negotiating the peace that followed. Giolitti was no longer the 'minister of gangsterism' but a serious statesman.[65]

Prezzolini's nationalism was moral and intellectual. It sought a change in the fundamental values of his society coupled with a systematic and sincere analysis of its ills, a real spiritual revolution. Nationalism could be applied politically only by men of action, liberated from any kind of dogma and wholly realistic about the

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62 Idem, *La voce*, pp. 147–148.
63 Prezzolini, 'Programma politico,' *La voce*, p. 342.
64 Idem, 'Sonino e Giolitti,' *La voce*, p. 742. See also G. Salvemini, *Il Ministro della mala vita*, Florence 1910.
65 Prezzolini, 'Dopo un anno,' *La voce*, pp. 731–732.

conditions in which they had to perform their duties. Through the nexus of realism, the ideals of truth and right could be channelled into political action.[66]

Political realism led Prezzolini to take a grim view of Italy. He saw it as a land of talented people lacking in will, with a high level of rhetoric and a low level of action. The country was beautiful and its people good, but its performance was mediocre in comparison both to its own past and to that of the transalpine and transoceanic countries. Everything seemed to be old. Nevertheless, the young Prezzolini, as he embarked in 1908 on the project of *La voce*, felt that a movement of renewal was feasible. In his travels around Italy he encountered youth groups and individuals who displayed independence and impatience, traits which could be turned to the country's benefit. There were modernists, syndicalists, Leonardians, Croceans, socialists tired of Marxism, republicans fed up with Mazzinianism and all kinds of disgruntled minorities that could provide Italy with the words and actions needed for change.[67]

His ideal for the Italians was that they should become more practical, disciplined and cultivated, more receptive to the vision of the great modern world. A couple of generations dedicated to a process of spiritual renewal could do it, 'on· the condition that Italians felt their inferiority when comparing themselves to other peoples; on the condition that they renounced the habits that lowered their moral value and dignity; on the condition that they undertook a purifying examination of their own conscience.'[68]

Prezzolini's historicist vision of Italy led him to try to unveil the underlying dynamics of Italian politics, within the framework of an analysis of Fascism and its accession to power. He posited four rules to be taken into account by those seeking to analyze Italy or take part in Italian politics: (1) 'What counts is political action, that is to say, the conquest of power. The struggle for power is more important than the realization of the programme.' (2) 'In Italy every political phenomenon has regional forms and characteristics.' (3) 'Italy has not yet entered into the modern capitalist age. The only region of large-scale industry is the Po valley, a triangle approximately defined by Genoa, Turin and Brescia.' (4) 'The monarchy is still an important factor in Italian political life, an element of equilibrium and moderation.'[69]

66 On Prezzolini's nationalism and *La voce* see E. Gentile, *'La voce' e l'età giolittiana*, Chap. 4, pp. 109–126.
67 Prezzolini, *L'italiano inutile* (above, note 3), pp. 93–94.
68 Idem, 'Codice di vita italiana,' *Il meglio*, p. 177.
69 *Le fascisme*, pp. 15–22.

Having established Prezzolini's goals and rules, let us turn to the negative qualities he wished to eradicate. The basic problem — of character, of education, of justice, of boldness, but mainly of truth — resided in the Italian soul. The Italians had to see themselves as they really were, with all their flaws.[70]

What Prezzolini saw in Italy was neither democracy nor aristocracy, but anarchy.[71] From his point of view, Italy was two countries. Northern Italy was European; southern Italy was Balkanic or North African, and had been colonized by the North.[72] The country was also divided along class lines, between the bourgeoisie and the masses. In fifty years of unity, the bourgeoisie had been unable to create a decent military tradition or to fulfill properly the role of a leading class.[73] It enjoyed the privileges of rule but had no sense of duty.[74] To be sure, it possessed certain artistic and scientific qualities that permitted Italy to manifest an external image of superior life, based on academic, state and industrial institutions. But between the bourgeoisie and the Italian masses lay an abyss. The majority, Prezzolini wrote, had a barbarian mentality which had not even attained the level of Christianity; abandoned for centuries, the people were devoid of justice or truth.[75]

In general, Prezzolini gave the Italian people very little credit, although he thought that the lower classes showed themselves better at war than the bourgeoisie. He attributed their poor performance on the battlefield to lack of leadership and long-term neglect.[76] The Italian army in World War I reflected the country's shortcomings: laziness, poor leadership, lack of discipline and cohesion, combined with ignorance, corruption and foolishness, were a sure recipe for military disaster.[77] Italy had no sense of being a nation. The primary social unit was the family, while the only political unit with which Italians could identify was the *Comune*. The fatherland was a concept of the intellectuals, the province a concept of the bureaucracy, and the international working class a vague myth. Italy itself existed, in Prezzolini's eyes, as a historical hope that was in the process of being transformed into a concrete entity.[78]

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70 Idem, 'Vittorio Veneto,' *Il meglio*, p. 324.
71 Idem, 'Codice di vita italiana' (above, note 68), p. 182.
72 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
73 Prezzolini, 'Caporetto,' *Il meglio*, p. 273.
74 *Diario 1900–1941*, 31 March 1916, p. 210.
75 Prezzolini, 'Caporetto' (above, note 73), p. 299.
76 *Diario 1900–1941*, 10 November 1916, p. 237.
77 *Ibid.*, 30 October 1915, p. 176; and 31 March 1916, p. 210.
78 Prezzolini, 'Codice di vita italiana' (above, note 68), pp. 192, 194.

Ignorance, rhetoric and fundamental distrust between the classes produced a state of affairs in which Italy was governed by the *piazza*. Mass descent to the *piazza*, everyone knew, was the only way to force the corrupt government in Rome to act. Prezzolini observed sarcastically that this perhaps belonged to the heritage of ancient Rome, where political decisions were taken at the Forum.[79]

Prezzolini saw war as part of the process of moral renewal. War was a dynamic historical phenomenon, leading people to do things they had previously thought beyond their ability[80] and to act for a common goal, uniting body and spirit, deed and thought, individuals and classes. It was caused by the sense of injustice felt by unfree nations, oppressed workers, unsatisfied entrepreneurs and ignorant masses. As long as that sense inspired deprived groups to act violently on their own behalf, there would be no peace.[81] In the larger perspective, war was part of the competition between nations and clutures, in which the best civilization prevailed. Internationalism could thus become a reality only through war, after the resolution of the differences that separate nations and spur them to compete. A better world would be one in which cultural polemics, free trade and international war — to Prezzolini, three sides of the same phenomenon — led civilization to perfect itself.[82]

Prezzolini was convinced, and predicted in 1916, that the war would trigger a social earthquake in Italy, because it was the only education the masses were getting. The electorate had increased from 3,329,147 in 1913 to 11,115,441 in 1919.[83] The country was poor and disorganized, the bourgeoisie narrow-minded and the political class remote from the masses. This was fertile ground for political adventurism, which Prezzolini expected would emanate from the socialists if they could find the right leader.[84]

In a piece entitled 'Vittorio Veneto,' Prezzolini compared the battle of that name, which he considered a fabricated victory, with the real victory at the Piave a few months earlier. This was a prime example of dichotomous Italy. Vittorio Veneto represented the 'clever,' rhetoric-spouting Italians — the political and most of the military leadership —

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79 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
80 'Io credo' p. 215; Prezzolini, 'La guerra,' *La voce*, p. 723.
81 *Diario 1900–1941*, 25 January 1928, p. 414.
82 'Io credo,' p. 221.
83 *Le fascisme*, p. 27.
84 *Diario 1900–1941*, 24 April 1916, p. 214.

who, having won a battle by sheer chance thanks to the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian high command, adduced it as the ultimate military achievement. At the Piave, the battle was won by sweat, sacrifice and hard work, and the Italian military command therefore paid it scant attention. The two mentalities confronted each other in post-war Italy.[85] The country found itself mired in a deep socio-economic crisis which, Prezzolini noted, was part of a deeper moral crisis, born of the fact — and here Prezzolini borrowed the words of J.M. Keynes — that Europe had a hundred million more people than it could support. Underlying these developments was the secular state's inability to replace the Church as the framework for the country's lifestyle. War had shown the limits of sacrifice that Italian society could reach. While bringing out qualities of heroism and altruism on the individual level, it had also demonstrated clearly the defects in the country's political, social, cultural and economic structures, all of which seemed to be cracking in the face of the post-war crisis and the demands of the uneducated masses who had entered political life after graduating from the school of war.

Conclusion

Prezzolini has been characterized as an impresario of culture, a sparkling journalist, a courageous intellectual and a prolific writer, as a Fascist and an anti-Fascist. But throughout his life he was first and foremost a critic of Italy and the Italians. As an intellectual, he was second to the great figures of his time, but his intensive activity as a publicist — especially in the ten-year period between the founding of *Il Leonardo* in 1903 and the end of his collaboration in *La voce* — was crucial for the diffusion and popularization of their ideas in Italy. Prezzolini's critique of Italian liberal democracy undoubtedly helped create the climate in which interventionism, and later Fascism, could bring about the destruction of that political structure. Emilio Gentile pointed out that Fascism found a source of ideas and analysis in *La voce*. Nevertheless, many who took the lead in the antifascist movement participated in and were inspired by the Florentine review and its editor. What drew together all the writers and readers of *La voce* was the anti-Giolittism of Prezzolini and his associates, with their fierce attacks on the liberal democracy of the period.[86]

85 Prezzolini, 'Vittorio Veneto,' *Il meglio*, pp. 320–321.
86 E. Gentile, 'Fortuna de *La voce*,' *La voce*, pp. 923–924, 958, 996.

Prezzolini's historicism led him to conclude that Italy was not yet ready for the kind of democracy enjoyed by France and England, which was also far from perfect. A realistic view revealed the need for a profound change which required the thoroughgoing education of the Italian people. This idea crops up persistently in Prezzolini's writings. The masses were not rational and could not be expected to act rationally. Political liberalism could achieve and retain power only by resorting to coercion and corruption, thus becoming illiberal. Prezzolini was convinced that a precondition for change was a motivating idea that could inspire action. If they were to act, people had to believe. Rationalism was the domain of a small, educated elite. However, he opposed attempts to modernize and renovate Catholicism. A return to the past, he felt, was impossible. Technological and political progress entailed inculcating the people with a secular creed — belief in the state — to replace Christianity as society's cohesive force.[87] This partially explains his fascination with Mussolini as a politician, and his lesser fascination with Fascism.

Prezzolini's personal liberalism was an unattainable elitist ideal. It could have political significance only as a utopian goal, toward which Italy and all mankind would strive eternally. The New Italy was to be a modern country based on hard work and high moral standards. As an intellectual, though, Prezzolini's role was limited to defining the direction that had to be taken to achieve the nation's goals. His works were widely read in Italy, in both elite and general circles. The influence of *La voce* was notorious and is well documented by modern research.

Political realism led Prezzolini to a pessimistic worldview which left him, as an intellectual, no room for directly influencing the course of his country. Having offered the politicians a serious analysis of the choices and directions they might take, he could do no more than hope for the political application of his conclusions.

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87 Gentile reaches a similar conclusion in his 'L'impegno di un dilettante della cultura,' in F. Pino Pongolini (ed.), *Giuseppe Prezzolini 1882-1982*, Bellinozona 1983, p. 12.

PART V:

SPAIN, PORTUGAL AND BRITAIN —
MODERNITY AGAINST DEMOCRACY?

Andrew Dobson

Loathing of Democracy and Fear of the Masses? José Ortega y Gasset and Liberal Democratic Thought

One thing that everyone knows about the Spaniard José Ortega y Gasset is that he wrote a book called *La rebelión de las masas* (The revolt of the masses) some time in the 1920s. Fewer people know what it is actually about. As an undergraduate, before I had ever heard of Ortega, I came across this book in the library at my university and assumed that with a title like that, it must be by a Marxist. I could hardly have been more wrong. It turns out to be a hymn to a form of meritocratic liberalism far removed from any sort of collectivism, best received in frontier societies with aggressive political cultures, like the United States of America.

In many ways, the United States is a country in which Ortega would have been delighted to have been born. In the first decades of the twentieth century, it was everything his native Spain was not. It was as modern as Spain was still traditional, in the standard political and sociological senses of those words. It was increasingly urban, industrial, secular and technologically advanced, with a social and economic infrastructure appropriate to a country with modernizing aspirations. In comparison, Spain, particularly as Ortega saw it, had an agricultural economy worked by an ignorant population of superstitious peasants, and managed by politicians whose penchant for corruption was matched only by their ineptitude.

In this respect, Ortega was not the enemy of modernity or modernization that he is sometimes claimed to be. He was a modernizer in the sense that he sought a secular, urban, industrialized society, together with the kind of infrastructure necessary for such a society. And he was modern in the sense that he believed strongly in progress brought about by the exercise of rationality. To the extent that an antimodern position can be characterized by suspicion of rational progress, Ortega was 'modern' in the fullest political sense of the word.

The seeds of these convictions were planted early in his life. He spent some important formative years in Germany, and from then on was to cast envious glances towards northwestern Europe. Ortega most certainly never considered himself to be only a European, insofar as that meant not being Spanish; he was too much a devotee of Spain and her potential for that. But he did repeat on numerous occasions that 'Spain is the problem, and Europe is the solution.'

Working out in detail just what he meant by this would take me beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to bear it constantly in mind, because it provides the criterion against which Ortega's political principles must be measured. Ortega spent his political life working towards a modern, unified and competent Spain (all his own terms), and he was prepared to sponsor or reject political ideas to the extent that they contributed to that aim or failed to do so. Thus, in 1926, he wrote: 'Democracy and liberty aren't worth fighting over in a big way. ... We have to work out how much democracy and liberty by looking at the rest of the state's necessities, and not by hanging on to abstract principles.'[1]

But if the first thing to bear in mind is that Ortega wanted to see a modern Spain, the second is that he did not think that politics, as such, could do the job of renovation. The novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, who sought unsuccessfully to become President of Peru, is reported once to have said: 'Politics is intimately related to human mediocrity.' Intellectuals who dabble in politics are prone to making remarks of this sort, and Ortega was not averse to expressing similar sentiments in his time. Many of his political initiatives, and particularly his famous candidacy for the Republican Parliament in 1931, were characterized by this kind of hubristic reluctance.

However, he sought a more profound level of analysis than Vargas Llosa. He wrote: 'I believe I have always insisted on the following point in my writings: Spain will not be cured by politics. The reason is simple: the illness is not political, but deeper — it is historical.'[2] He thus expressed his conviction, worked out in detail in *España invertebrada* (Invertebrate Spain), that Spain's problem was one of inadequate human raw material, not the wrong types of political institutions. Until the 'average Spaniard' was changed, he insisted, Spain would remain on the periphery of material and cultural development. Moreover,

1   *El Sol*, 17 July 1926; also in J. Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas*, XI, p. 97 (henceforth, OC . All the translations, from both Spanish and French, are my own.
2   *El Sol*, 26 July 1924; also in *OC*, XI, p. 47.

changing the average Spaniard would involve more than tinkering with parliamentary procedure — although Ortega did not discount this entirely, as we shall see.

Having established that Ortega's principal interest was the forging of a modern and competent Spain on a par with northwestern Europe, and that politics, in his view, was at best only partially useful for such a task, I will now consider his views on liberalism and democracy. In 1926, Ortega wrote:

> Democracy and liberalism are answers to two completely different political questions. Democracy has to do with this question: who should exercise public power? The answer is: the exercise of public power corresponds with the citizenry as a whole. But in democracy, the issue of the extent of public power is not raised. It is simply a question of working out who ought to rule. Democracy proposes that we all rule; that is, that we all have a right to intervene in a sovereign fashion in social affairs.
>
> Liberalism, on the other hand, has to do with another question: notwithstanding who exercises public power, what should its limits be? The answer looks like this: public power, whether exercised by an autocrat or by the people as a whole, cannot be absolute, because people have rights prior to any incorporation into the State. ...
>
> In this way, the heterogeneous nature of both principles becomes clear. One can be very liberal and not at all democratic, or, vice versa, very democratic and not at all liberal.[3]

It is almost as if Ortega were setting out the political possibilities for himself here as well as for everyone else. Crudely speaking, he considered liberalism to be a more worthy political principle than democracy, for reasons that will become clear.

In one important way, however, Ortega believed that liberalism on its own was not up to the task of creating a modern and unified Spain. As he saw it, liberalism's immeasurably important historical task had been to grant a sense of dignity to the individual, and to prise her or him (probably 'him') free of the stultifying organic relationships that characterize traditional societies. But Ortega asked himself whether his Spanish project could be accomplished by a collection of individuals with no sense of communal purpose, and he concluded that it could

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3   Notas del vago estío,' *El Espectador*, V (1926); also in *OC*, II, pp. 424–425.

not. In this light, the historical function of democracy was to provide the sense of community so alien (as he thought) to liberalism. As he said in his watershed speech of 1914, 'Vieja y nueva política' (Old and new politics), which marked him off forever from the corrupt and failed political generations of the late nineteenth century: 'The manner in which religious, educational, social and administrative problems confront us today means that they can't be dealt with according to feeble individualist principles.'[4] The solution he proposed was democracy: 'The Spain of the future, gentlemen, will be one of community or it will be nothing at all. ... A people is a body composed of innumerable individuals, but with one soul. Democracy.'[5]

This is, to say the least, an idiosyncratic view of what democracy is about and why it is important. There is nothing here about the value of the sovereignty of the people, and nothing about the kinds of institutions which might make democracy possible. Democracy is depicted as a vague form of collectivity — a necessary communitarian adjunct to the excessive individualism of liberalism. What is more, a detailed examination of Ortega's work reveals that these are the only unequivocal kinds of statement that he is prepared to make in favour of democracy. Most of the rest of the time he hedges his remarks with concerns about its dangers. Particularly notable is his concern for the fate of the individual in the face of the tyrannous power which, in his view, democracy could represent, and in this respect he echoes such thinkers as John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville.

Indeed, in Ortega's own copy of the 1888 edition of de Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique*,[6] the folllowing passage is heavily marked, signalling his agreement: 'As far as I am concerned, when I feel power pressing down on me, it doesn't help me much to know who is oppressing me, and I am no better disposed to pass my head through the yoke just because a million arms hold it out for me.'[7] It was his desire to ensure space for the individual that led Ortega to write: 'Liberalism and democracy ... are not only two different things, but the former is also much more important than the latter.'[8]

The tension between this sentiment and the assertion that Ortega

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4 *OC*, I, p. 303.
5 'La pedagogía social como programa político' (12 March 1910), *OC*, I, p. 521.
6 The whole of Ortega's private library is housed in the Fundación Ortega y Gasset in Madrid, and is open to the public. It would be interesting to try to reconstruct a writer's thought from the notes she or he makes in the margins of other people's books.
7 Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Paris 1888, III, pp. 20–21.
8 'Libertad, divina tesoro!' *España*, 19 July 1915; also in *OC*, X, pp. 329–330.

saw democracy as an essential curb on the individualist excesses of liberalism can best be explained by way of two observations. First, remarks of the latter type are very few and far between in Ortega's work and are heavily outnumbered by arguments in favour of a classical liberal individualism. Second, they occur almost exclusively before his speech on 'Vieja y Nueva Política,' which, among other things, placed him more firmly in the individualist camp. So if he did hold these apparently contradictory views simultaneously, he did so only for a very short time, and it is best to view his overall position as one favouring a species of individual freedom which, on his reading, could only be threatened by democracy.

The reason why liberalism and democracy come into conflict, for both de Tocqueville and Ortega, is that they choose to view democracy as a system which implies unlimited power, which in turn becomes unlimited state power. This is not the only way to conceive of democracy (witness theories of participatory democracy which allow for local participation, thus undercutting the possibilities for excessive state involvement); but having decided to take it, Ortega creates a tension between liberalism and democracy, with the former acting as a check on the authoritarian tendencies of the latter. The relationship between liberalism and democracy has become the relationship between the individual and the state, by the expedient of defining democracy in terms of unlimited state power. Ortega also marked the following sentence in de Tocqueville: 'Among democratic peoples, individuals are very weak; but the State, which represents them and holds them all in the palm of its hand, is very strong.'[9]

But if Ortega was concerned about the effect that the exercise of democracy might have on the freedom of the individual, he was also convinced that democracy was here to stay and had to be accepted as part of the political furniture. This does not amount to an endorsement of democratic principles, of course, but it does place a limit on how far he was prepared to criticise them. Another book he possessed and evidently had read closely was J. Barthélemy's *Le problème de la compétence dans la démocratie*. Apart from the significance (as we shall see) of its title, a number of passages in Barthélemy's book, marked by Ortega, evidently struck a chord with him:

> Whether one likes democracy or not, there is only one rational way of thinking about it, and that is to realize that it is a fact, a

9   De Tocqueville, *De la démocratie* (above, note 7), p. 89.

necessary and inescapable fact, like the changing of the seasons or the movement of the stars. ... The thrust of democracy is generalized and irresistible. One can deplore it, in the same way as we might deplore the return of winter, and with equal uselessness. ... The best thing to do is to get used to it, to adapt oneself to it, and to adapt institutions to it as best as possible so as to extract the greatest benefit from it, or, rather, so that it causes the least possible damage.[10]

This reluctance to back democracy is a constant theme in Ortega's thought. It is with a detectable sigh of resignation that he asserted: 'In a modern nation, it would be impossible to govern contrary to the wishes of the people.'[11] For most of his political life, Ortega would have been quite happy to govern contrary to the wishes of the people, because he believed the people's wishes to be ill-informed and ill-directed. We will not find a principled defence of democracy in Ortega, then, but we will not find an unequivocal attack on it either.

At bottom, the issue at stake is that of competence. It was Ortega's belief that a modern Spain meant, at least in part, a competent Spain, and he did not think that democracy and competence went hand in hand at all. Ortega was neither the first nor the last to express such doubts, and he clearly set himself a riddle by simultaneously accepting democracy for a fact and believing, on balance, that democracy was not the right tool for creating the modern Spain he wanted. The general solution to this riddle involved putting democracy in its place: allowing it to operate in areas for which it was designed, but rejecting the belief that it could cure all ills.

In this respect, the very worst thing about democracy, from Ortega's point of view, was the sense of equality that it aroused. He was by no means opposed to the political equality embodied in the principle of universal suffrage, and he never suggested, as did John Stuart Mill, that it might be a good idea for particularly worthy citizens to have multiple votes. He did, however, frown upon the creeping disease of egalitarianism which the democratic virus could engender. De Tocqueville — again marked by Ortega in the margin — had talked of the 'secret instinct which the lower classes carry round with them,' an instinct he described as 'a feeling of envy.' This was not just a

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10 J. Barthélemy, *Le problème de la compétence dans la démocratie*, Paris 1918, p. 20.
11 'Ideas políticas: disociación necesaria de Parlamento y Gobierno,' *El Sol*, 3 July 1924; also in *OC*, XI, p. 36.

French instinct, he wrote, but a 'democratic' one. The problem was that 'democratic institutions awaken and then flatter a passion for equality without ever being able entirely to satisfy it.'[12]

Barthélemy wrote more bluntly that 'The logic of equality leads people to think not only that one man is as good as another, but that in matters of public interest, they all have as much knowledge as each other.' Ortega marked the next sentence heavily in red: 'Democracy, stated Bryce, underestimates the difficulties of governing and overestimates the capacity of men for common sense.'[13]

If it had been only a matter of common sense, Ortega might have felt more optimistic, because he did think that people could be improved; otherwise there would have been little point in his project of creating a better 'average Spaniard.' But the greatest danger of democracy involved the spread of its egalitarian principles into inappropriate areas. In 1917, Ortega wrote: 'Democracy as such, that is to say, as a principle of political right, is fine. But when it moves into areas beyond its jurisdiction, like religion, art, thought, the heart and custom, it is the most dangerous sickness that a society can suffer.'[14]

At this point, democracy becomes commonness (*plebeyismo*) — and to this Ortega was totally opposed. Equality must not be allowed to threaten properly constituted inequality, because inequality, as we shall see, is necessary to the efficient functioning of society. But how can we tell the democrat from the plebeian? Ortega's answer is revealingly unequivocal: 'Whoever gets irritated at seeing equals treated unequally but doesn't turn a hair when he sees unequals treated equally is not a democrat but a plebeian.'[15]

Underpinning all this was Ortega's elitist sociology. For him, a natural law decreed that societies will always be composed of a minority and a mass. Societies will be healthy provided their masses are humble and their minorities fulfill their guiding function. Societies will succumb, however, if their masses refuse to behave like a mass. Herein lay the danger of democracy: the egalitarian principle could overflow its boundaries and prevent the mass from obeying the natural law of hierarchy and recognizing its 'massness.' Looked at from this point of view, democracy is far more likely to make a nation sick than to generate health.

12 De Tocqueville, *De la démocratie* (above, note 7), II, p. 49.
13 Barthélemy, *Le problème de la competence* (above, note 10), p. 16.
14 'Democracia morbosa,' *El Espectador*, II (1917); also in *OC*, II, p. 135.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

At the same time, the sense of community which democracy generates, and which Ortega earlier saw as a useful antidote to the individualist excesses of liberalism, can also be taken to dangerous extremes. It is a maxim of Ortega's philosophy that the fundamental reality in the world is individual human life. A corollary of this maxim is that an authentic life is one lived and thought through individually. Ortega goes so far as to say that two plus two equals four, radically, only when the reasons for this equivalence have been established by the individual in question. In this context, the existence of the social world with its repertory of established beliefs, into which we are necessarily born, represents the temptation to accept the social at the expense of the individual. For Ortega, the individual is authentic and the social is inauthentic, and so democracy carries with it the threat of the inauthenticity of the social.

But even if the threats posed by democracy to the freedom of the individual, to the natural hierarchies necessary for a healthy society, and to the freedom to be authentically oneself did not exist, Ortega was by no means persuaded that democratic government can be competent government — given the incompetence both of politicians and of the people who elect them. Nor is the incompetence of politicians simply a reflection of the incompetence of voters. If that were the case, then Ortega's 'improve the average Spaniard' project should logically result in a more able class of politician. But Ortega, as we have noted, believed that politics is an arena of mediocrity, to which able people, in general, do not feel called. From this point of view, politicians are always likely to be incompetent. As de Tocqueville observed (and Ortega marked with his crayon): 'On my arrival in the United States, I was struck that merit was so common among the governed, and so rare among those doing the governing.'[16] Being elected, Ortega observed, meant only that the politician in question was good at being elected, that is, at winning votes; it revealed nothing about a person's ability to manage national affairs in the general interest.

But Ortega did believe that the voters themselves could be improved. Two strategies to bring this about emerge from his work, one of which (crudely speaking) has antidemocratic implications and the other democratic ones. It should be stressed that in neither case did Ortega himself talk about these strategies in terms of democracy. The point was to create a modern and competent Spain, not to try to realize

16 De Tocqueville, *De la démocratie* (above, note 7), II, p. 47.

political principles. The first strategy involves a politics of the education of the mass by the elite, and the second revolves around a series of institutional reforms which would have the effect of educating people through political participation. It is particularly surprising that Ortega does not talk about the second strategy in terms of democracy, because he makes precisely the sort of suggestion advanced by supporters of participatory democracy — that democracy is not only a form of government but also an educative way of life.

Writers as diverse in other ways as James Mill and Joseph Schumpeter are united in their conviction that improvement of the masses is a chimera, and this is one of the reasons they advance for leaving politics to the experts. It should be clear that Ortega's elitism was different; he did not believe that the masses are a lost cause, destined to wallow forever in their ignorance. At the same time, he had no great expectations for the kind of education that can come out of political participation. It is political education, properly speaking, with no pretense at facilitating the development of individuals in other aspects of daily life. This, of course, is consistent with Ortega's assertion that politics is 'of an adjectival and instrumental order with respect to life,'[17] and it can do relatively little, in fact, to improve the average Spaniard.

Taking public opinion into account, of course, is *grosso modo* what democracies are supposed to do better than any other political system so far tried. Put differently, any system which ignored public opinion would be hard-pressed to call itself democratic. From time to time, Ortega recommended the complete bypassing of public opinion: 'The dictator, like the democrat, if he wants to achieve anything worthwhile, will have to go against public opinion. If not, public opinion will return to what it created: the "old politics".'[18] This is part of Ortega's novel interpretation of the famed Spanish phenomenon of *caciquismo*, a system whereby public figures used their wealth and/or influence to dominate the political and administrative life of a village and its surroundings. The standard view was that the *caciques* maintained their position against the will of the people, but Ortega insisted that it was precisely the gutlessness and ignorance of the people that enabled *caciquismo* to survive so long.

But more often than not, and in keeping with his belief that no country in modern times could be run productively against the will of the people, his general aim was to improve public opinion, and to bring

17 'Democracia morbosa,' (above, note 14), p. 136.
18 'Sobre la vieja política,' *El Sol*, 27 November 1923; also in *OC*, XI, p. 31.

it up to the level demanded by a nation on the brink of material and intellectual modernity. Ortega's first strategy, then, was to educate the people directly, and he spent much of his early political life expounding a pedagogic theory of political activity: knocking people into shape so that they could exercise their political rights constructively. In 1910 he gave a keynote speech entitled 'La pedagogía social como programa político' (Social pedagogy as a political program), and from 1913 onwards created an organization called 'La liga de educación política' (The League for Political Education). As he wrote later on, in 1922: 'To ask for perfect suffrage from a nation like ours is to ask the impossible,'[19] and so, 'The first thing, as far as we're concerned, is to promote the organization of a minority charged with the political education of the masses.'[20]

In complete consistence with the principles of his elitist sociology, Ortega was absolutely clear about the direction of influence in this educational relationship — the elite would teach and the mass would listen: 'We are first of all going to be the friends of those whom we will later lead.'[21] Pretty soon, Ortega's League for Political Education foundered for lack of either interest or success, and while he continued to subscribe to the necessity for an active elite and a docile mass, he gradually came to emphasize his second method of political education: political participation itself.

Contrary to standard opinion which depicts Ortega as a Castilian centralist of the old school, he had long championed the cause of regional politics — had done so, in fact, ever since Antonio Maura had tried to initiate political reform through the town councils in the first decade of the century. The problem, though, was that Spain was predominantly a rural country with a rural mentality. Given a constitutional democracy, argued Ortega, the outcome of a national vote would be the election of politicians steeped in traditional rural agriculturism rather than modern urban industrialism. This, he felt, was entirely inappropriate for a nation seeking to place itself in the front rank of modernizing nations. In 1928, he explained it like this: 'The reality of our nation is one of mountain and countryside — ruralism — and it is therefore composed of the kind of person most opposed to bureaucracy, industrialism and intellectual pursuits.' The result was

19 'Ideas políticas: ejercicio normal del parlamento (II),' *El Sol*, 2 July 1922; also in *OC*, XI, p. 24.
20 'Vieja y nueva política' (1914), *OC*, I, p. 302.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

that 'of 400 national representatives, 360 were elected by totally rural districts.'[22] Bureaucrats, intellectuals and industrial financiers were important, Ortega believed, because only they could think in terms of 'grand political abstractions.'[23]

Ortega knew that the real solution to the problem lay in industrialisation itself, because only this would create the kind of 'industrial culture' which he associated with modernity. But he also thought that provisional improvements could be made through judicious institutional reform — primarily when it was designed to encourage learning through political participation.

So Ortega was led inexorably to affirmations of local politics which have a significant affinity with those of enthusiasts of participatory democracy. The beneficial educative effect of participation is clear: 'If we want [the average Spaniard] to act in a reponsible public fashion, we have no choice but to oblige him to do so, and we can only oblige him to do so by placing the responsibility for problem-solving in the hands of as many citizens as possible.'[24] Thus, careful analysis of the institutional reforms which Ortega proposed during the decade of the 1920s reveals that he believed that one of the principal problems with democracy — that of competence — could be (partly) solved by democracy itself.

The fact that Ortega did not once refer to these reforms in terms of improving the quality of democracy is revealing. Basically, he never was concerned with democratizing Spain; he was only interested in modernizing it, and the fact that his participatory suggestions have something to do with democracy is accidental rather than designed. At stake was the competence and efficiency of political decision making, and his main concern was to tailor institutional arrangements to meet these requirements.

This aspect of his thinking is clear with regard to the final democratic context to which I want to refer, that of Parliament. Ortega argued that modern parliaments (and particularly the Spanish one) suffered from the misguided attempt to reproduce direct democracy in inappropriate circumstances — i.e., the modern nation-state. He wrote: 'It used to be believed that perfecting democracy involved looking for some approximation to direct democracy. ... Nowadays this mistake has been

22 'La Constitución y la nación' (in *La Redención de las provincias*), *El Sol*, 18 January 1928; also in *OC*, XI, p. 214.
23 *OC*, XI, p. 212.
24 'Maura o la política,' *El Sol*, 10 January 1926; also in *OC*, XI, p. 89.

put right, and it is understood that the improvement of democracy lies rather in the opposite direction.'[25]

As I have pointed out, Ortega felt that the parliamentarians produced by a direct vote of the population would be representative of the worst features of ignorant ruralism — precisely the opposite of the qualities demanded by modern industrialism. One solution, as we have seen, was to educate the voters; another, however, was to be more canny with respect to the selection procedure itself. Ortega's idea was to set up a series of ten regional parliaments, reduce the number of deputies in the national Parliament from 400 to about 100 (he thought that finding 400 able representatives was an impossible task), and have them elected by the regional parliaments rather than by universal suffrage. He hoped that the combination of a more informed electorate (now charged only with electing regional parliaments) with a series of regional parliaments (now with a greater sense of the needs of national as opposed to local politics, and thus better equipped to send the right people to the national Parliament) would produce the effective national politicians he thought so necessary.[26]

Some of this may have come from Alexis de Tocqueville, who, as Ortega noted, remarked that while the American House of Representatives lacked exceptional people, the Senate, by contrast, was full of them.[27] De Tocqueville's explanation was as follows: 'The election which produces the House of Representatives is direct, while that from which the Senate emerges is at two removes.'[28] This sounds very similar to the filtering process that Ortega advocated.

However this may be, he thought that his recommendation would not only have the effect of producing more able representatives, but it would also restore the tattered prestige of Parliament. This was important not so much because Parliament was a democratic institution, but because it was a symbol of authority —— an attribute conspicuously lacking in the political and economic shambles that characterized Spain during the first decades of the twentieth century. Ortega was concerned more for this symbolic value of Parliament than for its democratic credentials, and he went so far as to say that the important thing for the Spanish Parliament was to focus on its symbolic sovereignty and leave governing to the executive.

25 'El parlamento: como se pueden tener mejores parlamentarios,' *El Sol*, 19 July 1924; also in *OC*, XI, p. 46.
26 'Maura o la política,' (above, note 24); *OC*, XI, p. 88
27 De Tocqueville, *De la démocratie* (above, note 7), II, pp. 54–55.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

This would be reasonable (in democratic terms) as long as we were left with the impression that Parliament would continue to legislate, or at least scrutinize the executive, but it is hard to escape the conclusion that Ortega's Parliament would be charged with issuing rubber stamps: 'The new Parliament should meet very rarely and with great solemnity,' he wrote.[29] It was not possible in a modern, complex nation for the sovereign to govern, he argued, and so the government — elected by Parliament[30] — must be able to act independently of Parliament, and to be constitutionally guaranteed a certain (unspecified) lifetime so as to be able to fulfill its program unhindered.

Conclusion

While I hope it is clear from these remarks on liberalism and democracy in Ortega's thought that he is far from being the Fascist ogre of Spanish Republican nightmares, it would most certainly be wrong to jump to the conclusion that he was an unequivocal champion of these two political principles — and certainly not of the second one.

His basic desire was the creation of a modern, industrial Spain, and he was prepared to enlist almost any political principle into service if he thought it could help. He did think, however, that being modern, to a certain extent, meant being liberal and democratic, and so he was never prepared to abandon either of these principles altogether — though that reluctance may have been generated as much by the recognition that democracy was here to stay and that he could not do much about it anyway, as by any positive assessment of its worth. To his credit (from the democratic point of view), he never suggested that people should pass some sort of competence test before being allowed to vote, even though his main concern regarding democracy was what he perceived as its threat to competence and to the natural heirarchies necessary for ensuring quality leadership.

Having identified public opinion as a problem, however, Ortega sought a number of ways of 'improving' it — some of which come pretty close to ignoring it altogether, even if only temporarily. We have seen how he mounted elitist educational campaigns, and also how he suggested institutional reforms which (in one guise) would apparently

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29 'Un parlamento: como dignificar su función,' *El Sol*, 12 July 1924; also in *OC*, XI, p. 40.

30 'Disociacióon necesaria de Parlamento y Gobierno,' *El Sol*, 3 July 1924; also in *OC*, XI, p. 37.

have had the effect of removing government even from parliamentary scrutiny, let alone that of the population at large. Significantly, his other strategy for education — that of political participation — is never defended in terms of democracy but only in terms of efficiency and competence.

One commentator has remarked: 'Democracy — and this is the meaning it has for Ortega — consists in converting public opinion into law.'[31] This, however, says nothing about whether a democrat must take public opinion at face value, or whether he or she is entitled temporarily or institutionally to massage it into an 'acceptable' form, which was Ortega's preferred option. As the same commentator goes on to say (without apparently recognizing the confusion), 'Not all opinions are equally valuable.'[32] This is certainly true, but it sets up dangerous precedents for democratic practices. Whose opinions are going to count, and who decides? In view of his position on this issue, I would characterize Ortega as a reluctant democrat, along with thinkers as diverse in other respects as John Stuart Mill and Lenin.

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31 Ignacio Sánchez Cámara, *La Teoría de la minoría en Ortega y Gasset*, Madrid 1986, p. 227.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

António Costa Pinto

Modernity versus Democracy?
The Mystical Nationalism of
Fernando Pessoa

*I was born in a time when most young men had lost their belief in God for the
same reason their elders had retained it — not knowing why. And then, since
the human spirit naturally tends to criticize because it feels and not because
it thinks, the majority of these young men chose Humanity as a successor to
God. ...*

*This cult of Humanity, with its rites of Liberty and Equality, always seemed
to me a revival of the ancient cults in which animals were like gods or the
gods had animal heads.*

*So, not knowing how to believe in God and not being able to believe in
a summa of animals, I was left, like others on the fringes of society, in that
distance from everything which is commonly called Decadence. Decadence is
the total loss of unconscious life because unconsciousness is the basis of life. If
the heart could think, it would stop.*

Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*[1]

i

Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), who was possibly one of the best
European writers of the twentieth century, left to posterity hundreds
of pages of 'political sociology,' a term he himself chose to describe
some of his writings on political subjects. Like most of Pessoa's frenetic
literary output, only a small part was published during his lifetime. The
little he did publish before his death established him from the outset as
an apostle of 'mystical nationalism' and of an authoritarianism whose
scope transcended the narrow limits of the Portugal of his day.[2]

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1   F. Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, New York 1991, pp. 142–143
2   For a bibliography on Fernando Pessoa, see J. Blanco, *Fernando Pessoa: Esboço de uma
    bibliografia*, Lisbon 1983.

A son of the Lisbon upper middle class (descended from a mixture of nobility and Jews, in his own description), Pessoa had a British-style education, which was very rare, if not unique, within the Portuguese intellectual elite of the time. He attended English schools in South Africa and wrote mainly in English in the first years after his return to Lisbon. After dropping out of the Arts Faculty of Lisbon, he lived a retiring, almost sequestered life, working as a translator for various firms and contributing to literary reviews and newspapers. Though he never lost the habit of writing in English, it was in Portuguese that he wrote his best poetry and literary prose.

In the second half of this century, Pessoa's literary oeuvre, both poetry and prose, has been discovered. As more and more of his works are published and spread abroad, a multitude of specialists has emerged. Less attention, however, has been devoted to the political and 'sociological' writings of this Portuguese modernist.[3]

Pessoa's activity in Portuguese politics was sporadic and unostentatious, but in his few public statements concerning his political position, he never concealed his radical critique of liberalism and democracy. He had a mystical belief in the efficacy of a 'saviour,' whom he saw in the person of Sidónio Pais, charismatic leader of the brief Portuguese dictatorship of 1917–1918, and he defended the dictatorship set up by the military in 1926, which finally overthrew republican liberalism. His literary companions in Portuguese futurism and modernism were almost all right wing, and he was much admired in the 1930s among the exponents of National Syndicalism, the brief expression of a Portuguese Fascist movement, which was suppressed by Salazar.[4] In 1935, the Secretariat for National Propaganda, an official organ of the 'New State,' gave a prize (not first) to his volume of poetry, *Mensagem* (Message), perhaps the best Portuguese nationalist synopsis of this century. Only in the last years before his death did he distance himself from Salazar's 'New State,' and his last public act was in defence of Freemasonry, which was later banned by the regime. Shortly before his death, in a biographical note, he described his political ideology: 'English-style Conservative, i.e., liberal within

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3   Cf. J. Serrão, *Fernando Pessoa: Cidadão do imaginário*, Lisbon 1981. For a recent review see *Encontro Internacional do Centenário de Fernando Pessoa*, Lisbon 1990, pp. 103–191.
4   Cf. Alfredo Margarido, 'Sobre as posiçõtes políticas de Fernando Pessoa', *Colóquio-Letras* 23 (1975), pp. 66–68. On the National Syndicalists and Portuguese literature cf. A. Costa Pinto, 'The Literary Aspirations of Portugues Fascism,' in S.U. Larsen & Beatrice Sandberge (eds.), *Fascism and European Literature*, Bern–New York 1991, pp. 238–253.

conservatism and absolutely antireactionary, ... anticommunist and antisocialist.'[5]

If Pessoa's public actions were rare, his reflections on the society and politics of the early twentieth century were abundant, as evidenced in numerous writings unpublished in his lifetime. Leaving aside works dealing exclusively with Portuguese subjects, his unfinished and projected volumes included *Political Sociology, Political Suffrage, Sociology of European History* and *The German War*, an essay on World War I.[6]

Like many other thinkers and writers of his generation, Pessoa meditated obsessively on the accelerated process of political and social change which characterized the beginning of the twentieth century, seeking an alternative to the 'decadence' and 'denationalization' of the present in a redeeming synthesis of 'past' and 'future.' It is this alternative that we shall discuss here, in an attempt to identify some of the elements of the 'catch-all extremism' that characterized Pessoa's work on 'political sociology.'[7]

Pessoa was a rare example of an apologist for modernity inspired by mystical nationalism. He was in favour of both industrialization and nationalism; he believed in supermen who would regenerate their fatherlands and in 'aristocracies' of citizens (not a 'class,' as he liked to point out); and he defended intuition and the unconscious, to which only the 'nation' and its saviour could give positive expression.[8]

Nationalism was in fact the only constant factor in Pessoa's political thinking and the main radicalizing element in his writing.[9] All his

5 J.G. Simões, *Vida e Obra de Fernando Pessoa*, Lisbon 1987[5], pp. 693–694.

6 I quote below from two versions of Pessoa's political writings. The first is the edition of J. Serrão, published in three volumes: *Da República (1910–1935)* (Lisbon 1979, henceforth: *DR*); *Sobre Portugal: Introdução ao problema Nacional* (Lisbon 1979, henceforth: *SP*); and *Ultimatum e Páginas de Sociologia Política* (Lisbon 1980). The second is the two-volume edition of António Quadros, *Páginas de Pensamento Político, 1: 1910–1919*, and 2: *1925–1935*, Lisbon 1986 (henceforth: *PP1* and *PP2*). A French edition of Pessoa's works, edited by Robert Bréchon and Eduardo Prado Coelho, is in preparation.

7 For the concept of 'catch-all extremism' cf. Jonathan Mendilow, 'The Political Philosophy of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881): Towards a Theory of Catch-All Extremism,' in J.A. Hall (ed.), *Rediscoveries: Some Neglected Modern European Political Thinkers*, Oxford 1986, pp. 7–26.

8 For an interesting, though dated, Marxist interpretation of Pessoa's political thought, see Alfredo Margarido, 'La pensée politique de Fernando Pessoa,' *Bulletin des Etudes Portugaises*, 32 (1971), pp. 141–184. This article, as far as I know, is the first to attempt a historical or social-science approach to Pessoa's works.

9 Cf. J. de Prado Coelho, 'O Nacionalismo Utópico de Fernando Pessoa,' *Colóquio*, no. 31, Lisbon 1964, pp. 53–57.

reflections on current politics and ideology derived from this basic principle, varying with little concern for consistency, which he did not actually consider a virtue. 'Consistency,' he wrote, 'is a disease, an atavism, perhaps; it has been passed down to us by animal ancestors in whose state of evolution such a misfortune would be natural.'[10] Nevertheless, it may be said that Pessoa's brand of nationalism was no reactionary, Maurrasian or Catholic traditionalism; it was meant to be a modernizing factor. Thus, in one of his more apologetic essays, he defined the German example during World War I as that which most closely followed the path he outlined.

ii

Pessoa had no use for the 'social sciences.' He was deeply affected by the discovery of the 'unconscious' and by 'intuitive' historicism, and he rejected the scientific pretensions of nascent sociology:

> In social matters there are no scientific facts. The only sure thing in 'social science' is that there is no idea whatsoever of what society is; we do not know how societies are formed or how they are maintained or how they decline. So far, not one single social law has been discovered; there are only theories and speculations which, by definition, are not science. And where there is no science, there is no universality.[11]

Influenced by liberal individualism and by the idea of the irreversibility of capitalism, Pessoa also rejected the 'corporatist' and anti-individualistic pretensions of the traditionalists, in the name of the same radical nationalism. 'In society,' he wrote, 'there are only two real entities: the individual, because he is really alive, and the nation, because it is the only way that these living creatures called individuals can unite socially in a stable and fruitful way. The mental foundation of the individual, because he is an individual, is egoism, and individuals can form groups only because of a superior egoism that is both personal and social. This is that of the fatherland, in which we find ourselves again through others who are stronger than we are.'[12]

His rejection of both corporatism and Marxist or sociological 'classism' also derived from his radical nationalism. Apart from

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10 *PP1*, p. 61.
11 *DR*, p. 309.
12 *SP*, p. 121.

language, all the factors involved in the formation of groups in national life — the 'intermediate fictions, half physical, half economic, like class, the family or religion' — might contribute to the disintegration of the nation if they became too important.[13]

A second aspect of this rejection of corporatism and of the other dogmas of Latin counter-revolutionary traditionalism derived from capitalism itself, on which Pessoa wrote (and published) a great deal.[14] His interest in economic theory and his practical knowledge of market mechanisms, rare among intellectuals of literary origin, led him to accept the principles of liberal capitalism, which he recognized as one of the pillars of civilization: 'the economic tradition, represented by the three principles of property, capitalism and competition.' Poking fun at the post-war anticapitalist wave, he wrote: 'Perhaps in another age on earth, on another planet, on an earth in another solar system, other principles may be valid for maintaining civilization and everything it represents. Not among us Europeans.'[15]

The philosophical recognition of the 'individual,' along the lines of liberal elitism taken to the extreme, underwent a cultural mutation when transferred to real society, and was not to be confused with an acceptance of democracy or egalitarianism. The 'people' of the political massification of the turn of the century aroused in him the deepest repugnance and scepticism: 'the "people" are not educable, because they are the people. If they could be converted into individuals they would be educable, they would be educated, but they would no longer be the people.' Before God, perhaps, the people and individuals were the same, but not before science: 'What the people want is a miracle. A miracle is what they understand. It does not matter whether it is performed by Our Lady of Lourdes or by Fátima, or by Lenin. The people is fundamentally, radically, hopelessly reactionary. Liberalism is an aristocratic concept and therefore totally opposed to democracy.'[16]

iii

From the point of view of historical legitimation, Pessoa's nationalism presents no great intellectual innovations. Looked at alongside other products of the cultural elites of Latin Europe, its most outstanding

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13 *Ibid.*
14 *PP2*, pp. 107–197.
15 *PP1*, p. 124
16 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

aspect was the slight importance he attributed to the 'mystical' rein-
vention of a pre-capitalist Europe, a concept that dominated most of
his generation.[17] More than anyone else, he viewed nationalism as an
emotional girding for the advent of the 'superman' who represented the
national unconscious.[18] Maurras and the whole spectrum of represen-
tatives of classical counter-revolutionary thought, whose Portuguese
equivalents he knew well, never earned his respect.[19] His 'cosmopoli-
tan' and 'synthetic' nationalism, 'which consisted of ascribing to a
nationality not a fixed tradition as a principle of individualization, but
a special way of synthesizing the influences of the civilization game,'
was opposed to traditionalist nationalism.[20]

Pessoa's violent antidemocratism did not omit the classic association
of liberalism with decadence. The nineteenth century, in his eyes, was
characterized by the adoption of 'foreign' and 'imported' forms of
government that had led to the degeneration of many nations. But
his attitude derived more fundamentally from what he saw as the
inability of democracy to reflect the national unconscious: 'One must
distinguish between the will of the majority and the national will.
The will of the majority is conscious; the national will is unconscious.'
And who feels this 'national will'? 'As this process is unconscious,
the fruit of who knows what social laws, it can only exist either in
the unconscious strata of the country or in the conscious ones which
represent that unconscious. The party that wins is always that which
represents power at any given moment; and if that party, and no other,
represents power it is because the unconscious strata of the nation have
mysteriously chosen it to execute their unconscious will.'[21]

In essays written between 1915 and 1919, Pessoa presented his
fellow Portuguese, so far west of the European centre, with examples
of national rebirth — one of which was Germany. The German state,
he wrote, had 'built' a commercial and industrial people, 'one of the
most perfect ever.'[22] The most important of the nationalist principles
represented by Germany was the centrality of the 'fatherland' in relation

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17 Especially the integralists, a sort of Portuguese version of the Maurrasian Action
française. On the influence of Maurras in the Iberian Peninsula see Eugen Weber,
L'Action Française, Paris 1964.
18 Nietzsche is obviously a central reference point for Pessoa, but we shall not develop
this issue here. Cf. M. Castro Henriques, *As coerências de Fernando Pessoa*, Lisbon 1989.
19 *SP*, p. 85.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
22 *PP1*, p. 131.

to civilization itself. The passage is worth quoting: 'The Fatherland is above civilization. That is, a Fatherland, a nationality, should be worth more to its components than the general movement of civilization to which it belongs.'[23]

Pessoa's sociological observations on the events of the war advocated an 'imperialism of Fatherlands,' which legitimized the disappearance or colonization of anything that was not a coherent 'nation-state.' 'All this may seem cruel,' he said, 'but science begins where sentiment ends, and thus Belgium, to the sociologist, has no right to exist. Nor, for that matter, has Austria. Neither of these nations is a people; neither has the social unity that a sociologist deems necessary for them to be a useful part of civilization.'[24]

In Europe at war, Pessoa saw 'clearly, for the first time in modern civilization, the renascent pagan forces and the decadent Christian forces fighting against each other.' The paganism of Germany was an example 'of that imperialism, that anti-Christian attitude which now, through her great material power, she could try to implement only by force and not by spirit ... The task [of sweeping away democratic, humanitarian and utilitarian ideals] is great and difficult! But this great anti-Christian task (anti-Christian in everything, antidemocratic, anti-Catholic, antimonarchical) must be accomplished.'[25]

In Pessoa's opinion, 'a century or more of the principles of 1789, of "liberty, equality and fraternity," [had] made most Europeans, with the exception of the Germans, unreceptive to the concrete ideas by which the future is built.'[26] Again giving Germany as an example, he remarked: 'The great problem of the future State will be to organize while refraining, as far as possible, from the limitation of freedom. In the present state of humanity, it is impossible to organize without oppression.'[27] Thus, Germany provided Portugal with an example of the 'spiritual continuation of imperialism, of the anti-Christian attitude which, with her material power, she is not able to achieve spiritually, and so has to bring about by force.'[28]

In his writings about Portugal, Pessoa posed himself as an apostle of the rebirth of nationalism, and he utilized some of the classic themes

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23 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
24 *Ibid.*
25 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
26 F. Pessoa, 'Como Organizar Portugal,' *Acção*, no. 1, 1 May 1919.
27 *PP1*, p. 140.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

of the late nineteenth century European radical right: reassignation of historical periods of glory and decadence, so that the glory coincided with Portuguese expansion and the 'decadence' with liberalism (an imported and 'foreign' liberalism which, with republican Jacobinism, had turned into 'degeneracy'); an irrational passion for the fatherland and deification of historical symbols of national identity; agitation for messianism as a mobilizing element; and other related themes familiar to any scholar of the period.[29] However, Pessoa's attitudes towards democracy and socialism did not stem only from his sense of their 'denationalizing' tendencies, nor need we necessarily be influenced, in examining them, by the concrete form eventually taken by the 'oligarchy of the beast' in Portugal.

iv

In the articles he wrote for *Acção*, a political review he helped found in 1919, Pessoa's systematic critique of democracy and the values he associated with it came to the fore. Based on 'scientific' premises, this rejection was no mere by-product of his nationalist obsession:

> Modern democracy, the political system which was born in the English revolution and flooded Europe by means of the English phenomenon called the French Revolution, is based on three points: the principle called 'liberalism,' which consists of a tendency to abolish the special privileges of certain classes or people and to establish the greatest possible equality among men; and the principle best called 'pacificism,' which means that peace among peoples is the normal, or what should be normal, state of social life. This is the meaning of the motto 'liberty, equality, fraternity' that the French Revolution converted into a Holy Trinity to be used by those who have no religion.[30]

His rejection of democracy was based on his belief, which he supported with modern psychological teachings, in the supremacy of the unconscious and the irrational in the conduct of individuals. 'Psychological science knows ... that man is basically a creature of habit and instinct and is an intellectual being only superficially, as something extra.'[31]

29 Cf. Z. Sternhell, *La Droite Revolutionnaire 1885/1914*, Paris 1978.
30 F. Pessoa, 'A Opinião Pública,' *Acção*, no. 2, 19 May 1919.
31 *Ibid.*

In a series of articles on 'public opinion,' Pessoa set out to destroy the conception that the individual's choice or opinion might have rational foundations. The basic themes in his radical critique of the democratic idea were the elitist view that the people constitute a formless mass guided by instinct, and a profound scepticism, substantiated by social psychology and neo-Darwinist doctrines, concerning the capacity of the plebs to be transformed into citizens. In one of his most radical statements about the working class, the poet quoted Haeckel on the ape–man continuity, saying that there was less difference between 'an ape and a man than between a worker and a truly cultured man.'[32]

Pessoa believed that where the vote expressed 'a political conviction, an idea ... it could only be the expression of an educated minority.' Suffrage represented, 'at most, the majority of those who are politically organized, which is a minority in relation to the real majority of society, and generally a very small one.'[33] In most 'modern' nations, the dominant factor is a 'political opinion' reflecting instinctive feelings, and this 'political opinion' is conservative by nature. Another element in Pessoa's rejection of democracy was cultural: while a dictatorship, he said, would be strange to northern Europe, 'when a parliament is set up in a Latin country, the nation is in danger.'[34] Obviously, in these reflections on the role of public opinion in a democracy, as in other articles about citizenship, Pessoa was thinking about Portugal, a peripheral, 'backward' country, no matter what standards of modernization were applied.

But Pessoa's reflections on political life were not limited merely to the repetition of reactionary dogmas. If, in terms of historical legitimation, his antidemocratism was based on theories of decadence and on some of the writings of Carlyle, Pessoa's quest for the elements of national rebirth was based on the discovery of myths that could solve the problem of the inclusion of the masses in the 'nation.'[35] Pessoa believed that the secret of the success of the revolutionary phenomenon in general and the Russian Revolution in particular (about which he was sceptical) was their reiteration of the element of religion, which was the only argument the masses could accept: 'Bolshevism (by which we mean both revolutionary syndicalism and Communism, and not

32 *PP1*, p. 171.
33 *Ibid.*
34 *DR*, p. 383.
35 On similar problems in Italian political culture see E. Gentile, *Il Mito dello Stato Nuovo Dall'Antigiolittismo al Fascismo*, Bari 1982.

just the latter) is a reactionary and religious phenomenon.'[36] So, the reaction to decadence should involve the construction of myths that included the 'plebs,' who should revolve around nationalism as their centre.

Pessoa observed the revolutionary phenomenon and at the same time rejected the idea of 'order.' He dismissed this 'romantic' preconception, as for him 'order in a society is what health is in the individual. It is not a *thing*: it is a *state*. It is a result of the proper functioning of the organism, and not that proper functioning itself.'[37] Therefore, one should not fall for 'the absurd idea that order is always necessary; sometimes disorder is necessary.'[38] Whenever the political regimes lose their ability to create a 'consensus,' disorder is inevitable and sometimes welcome. Thus, the struggles for 'national rebirth' and against 'decadence,' of which democracy was a symbol, were justified.

v

The central elements of this 'national rebirth' were a charismatic and 'providential' leader and a new elite. Pessoa discarded traditionalism in both these areas, in the former because he dismissed monarchism, and in the latter because the main factor in the creation of this elite was to be the middle classes.

Messianic leadership takes first place in Pessoa's plans for national rebirth. The first modern dictators, and above all the most populist and charismatic ones, earned his admiration, as demonstrated by what is perhaps the best known of his 'political' poems, his ode to 'King-President' Sidónio Pais (head of the brief Portuguese dictatorship of 1917–1918).[39] Pessoa viewed the dictator as having been chosen 'by the will of destiny, the right of force, a greater right than the votes which elected him.'[40]

The case of Sidónio is important because, at the time, he represented the closest example to the nascent Fascist model. Unlike Salazar, Sidónio was an extroverted and demagogic dictator, foreshadowing the Sebastianism of which Pessoa was a leading adherent, and in which he

36 *PP1*, p. 170.
37 F. Pessoa, 'O Preconceito da Ordem,' *Eh real!*, no. 1, 13 May 1915.
38 *PP1*, p. 154.
39 F. Pessoa, 'A Memória do Presidente-Rei Sidónio Paes,' *Acção*, II, no. 4, 27 February 1920.
40 *DR*, p. 239

saw the 'mystical qualities of a leader of the nation.'[41] His reflections on 'fatherlands in search of their leaders' would be interrupted only when Salazar came to power and his regime was institutionalized.

For Pessoa, the main requirement for national rebirth was the formation of a new elite. This was the only way to 'solve' the problem of the masses, whom Pessoa described with a contempt rare in the political culture of Latin Europe. In his words, the 'pleb' should be 'the instrument of the imperialists, the dominating caste, but their slaves, linked to them by a communion of national mysticism, so that they are enslaved willingl.'[42] Pessoa saw the new elite 'caste' as a synthesis of bourgeois elements and aristocratic attitudes. It was not only a class, but also a series of individuals; not an aristocracy of blood, but one of 'chance,' 'values' and 'action.' History once again served to legitimize antidemocratism, in that, where there was democracy, the level of this elite automatically went down. But if the 'people' merited considerable contempt, the middle class, 'the mainstay of a country,' deserved greater respect. They were a decisive element in the creation of a 'higher consciousness of nationality,' since they formed the basis of national life. Pessoa even suggested the creation of a special organ of propaganda to 'nationalize' them.[43]

vi

Some Pessoa scholars, especially those concerned with his literary activity, have tended to moderate Pessoa's ideological positions, pointing to the predominantly aesthetic rather than political motivation of most of his writings and the diversity of the positions he adopted. It is only since the 1970s that the reflections of several writers on 'Pessoa and politics' have cleared up the confusion between aesthetic aspirations and political ideology in his work. This debate, however, relates only to the Portuguese intellectual elites, and we shall not analyze it here. If we were also to consider the material he published specifically on Portuguese political life in his time, the picture would be even more complete.

41 *SP*, p. 129. Sebastianism refers to the mythical return of King Sebastian, the young sixteenth-century Portuguese king who disappeared in the Battle of Alcaçer Quibir, Morocco, in which the Portuguese army was defeated. Following the king's disappearance and probable death, Portugal lost its independence to Spain.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
43 *SP*, pp. 124–125.

Pessoa's political attitudes were characterized by an extreme radicality; on one occasion he even went so far as to applaud the hand of 'providence' for causing the most notable political figure of Portuguese republicanism to have a serious accident. In his later years, however, in reaction to Salazar's 'New State,' he returned to 'liberal nationalism.' He even prepared a new version, retracting his former views, of the famous essay in which he defended military intervention against the republican regime.[44] However, Pessoa's anti-Salazarism was due only to the concrete form that authoritarianism took in Portugal, involving as it did political elements with which he could never agree, especially because of their traditionalist, Catholic affiliations.[45] Some of his admirers, such as those who deplored the preference for traditionalism demonstrated by an official literary contest jury that failed to award his work the first prize, and especially Rolao Preto's Fascists, were situated to the right of Salazar's 'New State.'[46] If, despite their admiration, Pessoa kept his distance from these Fascist enemies of Salazarism, this did not make him an anti-Fascist, which he never was or wished to be.

Fernando Pessoa was the apostle of an antidemocratic and elitist nationalism. A mystical nationalism was perhaps the only element of ideological coherence in his work. He was always marked by the radicality of his ideological and political attitudes. It is true that, as a critic of democracy, his objections were based on somewhat less ideological grounds, but the historicist perspective he adopted and his many critical references to democracy always accentuated the 'denationalizing' and 'foreign' character of this feature of national periods of decadence. He had a mystical conception of history and firmly believed in the potential for a 'superman' to redeem the Fatherland.

Historically speaking, Pessoa's political and ideological views expressed the deep rift between nationalism and liberalism at the

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44 F. Pessoa, *O Interregno: Defesa e justificação da Ditadura Militar*, Lisbon 1928.
45 On the nature of the Portuguese 'New State' cf. A. Costa Pinto, *The Salazar 'New State' and European Fascism — Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, New York 1995.
46 Many Fascists and ex-Fascists wrote books and articles about Pessoa. See, for example, A. da Costa, *Portugal Vasto Império: Um inquérito Nacional*, Lisbon 1934; A. Ferreira Gomes, *No Claro Escuro das Professias*, Lisbon, n.d.; E. Freitas da Costa, 'Prefácio,' in *Fernando Pessoa*, Lisbon 1950; E. Frias, *O Nacionalismo Míastico de Fernando Pessoa*, Braga 1971; and N. Rogeiro, 'A Política em Pessoa,' *Futuro Presente*, no. 1 (1980). Cf. A. Costa Pinto, 'The Radical Right in Contemporary Portugal,' in L. Cheles et al., *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, London 1991, pp. 167–190; and idem, *Os Camisas Azuis: Ideologia, Elites e Movimentos Fascistas em Portugal, 1914–1945*, Lisbon 1994.

beginning of the twentieth century. It was in the name of an extreme nationalism that Pessoa broke away from liberalism and assimilated all the modernistic irrationalism represented by the futurist movement, in which he participated. He later returned to some positions closer to political liberalism, but he persisted in his rejection of democracy. As for Portuguese culture, his belief in the virtues of capitalism and industrial civilization led him to dismiss the dominant neo-ruralistic traditionalism. He was a rare example, in the Iberian Peninsula, of an apologist for an antihumanist neopaganism of German cultural origin. His rejection of Christianity played an important role here.

Pessoa's cultural proximity to futurism deeply affected his attitude towards politics.[47] Futurism allowed him to break both with traditionalism and with the synthesis between nationalism and modernist cosmopolitanism, while still retaining his liberally inspired individualism. As G.L. Mosse wrote:

> [The] new man of Futurism was not, properly speaking, an autonomous individual — though he was given the freedom of choice — but part of an elite of "supermen" voluntarily sharing an identical attitude towards life, discipline and claims to national leadership. Individualism meant possessing the strength of will to rise above the mass of men in order to accept Futurism and its consequences. Such an ideal catered successfully to youthful desires to be part of a community, and yet to retain their individual identity.[48]

In his 'Ultimatum' (1917), a futurist manifesto, Pessoa announced the coming of the 'supermen,' the 'total abolition of the concept of democracy' and of the French Revolution, and its substitution by 'the dictatorship of the complete, the true Man, and therefore of the Majority.' He proclaimed: 'I can only see the way; I do not know where it leads.'[49] It is in this modernist synthesis that we can perhaps best identify Pessoa's contribution to Portuguese antidemocratic political culture in the twentieth century.

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47 On Portuguese futurists and modernists see P. Rivas, 'Idéologies réactionnaires et séductions fascistes dans le futurisme portugais,' in G. Lista (ed.), *Marinette et le Futurisme*, Lausanne 1977, pp. 181–190; and M. Villaverde Cabral, 'The Aesthetics of Nationalism: Modernism and Authoritarianism in Early Twentieth-Century Portugal,' *Luso Brazilian Review*, 25 (1989), pp. 15–43.

48 G.L. Mosse, 'The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXV (1990), p. 256.

49 In *Portugal Futurista*, no. 1 (1917).

Leslie Susser

Right Wings over Britain:
T.E. Hulme and the Intellectual Rebellion
against Democracy

Thomas Ernest Hulme, self-taught and just thirty-four when he died, was by far the dominant influence in the British intellectual rebellion against democracy in the years leading up to the First World War and in the decade thereafter. It was Hulme who gave form to that strange, hybrid phenomenon of an avant-garde literature wedded to a reactionary politics. Yet for all its radical and innovative impulse, the Hulmean *Weltanschauung* was fundamentally stunted in its political drive. It threw down the gauntlet to liberal democracy, only to retreat behind liberalism's central tenets. It was constrained by at least two powerful British cultural traditions — liberalism itself and muscular Christianity. Hulme's notion of a restraining and ordering religion was not very different from Dr. Arnold's; and, as in the case of the venerable Doctor, it bred a conservatism that ultimately upheld existing forms.[1]

Hulme also derived from the muscular Christian tradition the notion of heroic group values transformed for national defence. But when it actually came to war, it was precisely the idea of the liberal democratic Patria which he had so virulently attacked that he would find himself citing in the country's defence. So powerful and persistent was the hold of liberalism in Britain that those on the radical right almost invariably were deeply ambivalent in their critique of its basic values. T.E. Hulme was no exception.

Liberalism Challenged

In nineteenth-century Britain, liberalism and all its works reigned

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1 For an account of the muscular Christian tradition and its dissemination through the public school system, see M. Girourard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, New Haven–London 1981; P. Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal*, London 1982.

supreme. There was a deep philosophical commitment to individual freedom and democratic institutions. Laissez-faire was a virtual fortieth article of economic faith. Free trade meant peace and a stable world order, with an ascendant Britannia ruling the waves, dominating the trade routes and building an ever-expanding Empire.

Towards the end of the century, however, as the course of international power began its subtle shift, the entire canon of liberal philosophy was called into question. In a new scientific age, the projection of national power could no longer be left to chance. Organization and efficiency were the new watchwords as the philosophical underpinnings of liberal democracy came under serious attack on several fronts.[2]

Nationalism and Social Efficiency

It was Benjamin Kidd, in his best-selling book *Social Evolution* (1894), who coined the term 'social efficiency.' What he meant by it was the most efficient possible mobilization of a society's material and spiritual resources. The course of world history would be determined not by the struggle between individuals or classes, but by the struggle between nations. Only those that achieved the highest degree of social efficiency would survive. The key to progress lay in the subordination of the needs of the individual to those of the group, in the 'simple-minded and single-minded devotion to conceptions of duty.'

Kidd laid the foundations for a new politics that rejected both liberal individualism and socialism, since both were based on a purely rationalistic analysis of the human condition and thus sought immediate satisfaction of immediate needs. They were selfish, materialistic creeds lacking a sense of the divine. Only groups that could discipline their members to sacrifice the selfish present for the sake of building a common future would advance along the evolutionary ladder. And the only way that such discipline would be possible, Kidd believed, was through the general acceptance of divine sanction.[3]

If Kidd's emphasis on spiritual elevation anticipated Hulme, his critique of liberalism's material failings anticipated a movement with adherents across a wide political spectrum. The Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb founded the 'Coefficients Club,' proclaiming that what

2   See G. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Though, 1899–1914*, Oxford 1971.
3   B. Kidd, *Social Evolution*, London 1894.

the Empire needed was 'deliberate organization.'[4] The Liberal Lord Rosebery claimed 'efficiency' as his watchword.[5] The popular socialist Robert Blatchford argued the case for a more German-like Britain: 'The German nation,' he said admiringly, 'is an army,' while the British were 'a mob of antagonistic, helpless atoms.'[6] Poet of the British Empire Rudyard Kipling berated the leaders of the nation for not training their young manhood for the stark struggle ahead: 'Ye pushed them raw to battle as ye picked them raw from the street.'[7] Hilaire Belloc and Bernard Shaw attacked the party system as an impediment to efficient government. Said Shaw: 'To ask Mr. A. to govern the country and to send in Mr. B. to prevent his doing it is an act of political lunacy.'[8] Both Belloc and Shaw also pressed an economic argument against democracy. It was, they said, the hidden hand of the plutocrat that really ruled, and in ruling defied the so-called will of the people — a charge later echoed by intellectuals close to Hulme, especially W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis.

But it was the one-time Liberal-turned-Unionist Joseph Chamberlain who spelled out the most serious economic indictment of liberal *laissez-faire* and posited an economic alternative to make for maximum social efficiency. Indeed, his Tariff Reform was nothing less than a program for national regeneration. 'Our object,' said Chamberlain, 'is ... the creation of an Empire such as the world has never seen.'[9]

The dominant idea behind all this thinking was the notion of struggle. In the harsh, modern world, nation would vie with nation. Victory would go to the better organized — that is, to those who most closely approached the organic state. T.E. Hulme would also see the modern world as a harsh and threatening environment, in which fallen man needed strict discipline if he was to achieve anything at all.[10]

Instrumentalization of the Code

It was considerations of this kind that led to the *fin-de-siècle* instrumentalization by the state of the nineteenth-century notion of the muscular

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4 S. Webb, 'Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch,' in *Nineteenth Century and After*, no. CCXCV (September 1901), p. 369; idem, *Twentieth Century Politics: A Policy of National Efficiency*, Fabian Tract No. 108, London 1901.
5 Lord Rosebery, Chesterfield Speech, 15 December 1901.
6 R. Blatchford, *Germany and England*, London n.d. (1911?), p. 35.
7 R. Kipling, *The Islanders*, New York 1902, p. 4.
8 G.B. Shaw, Preface to *On the Rocks* (1933), in *Collected Plays and Prefaces*, London 1973, p. 739.
9 J. Chamberlain, Glasgow Speech, 6 October 1903.
10 See p. 364 below.

Christian hero, the unflinching man of action, the officer and/or gentleman who lived by a strict code of honour. No longer simply 'flannelled fools' or 'muddied oafs,' the games-playing British heroes would become what Baden-Powell called 'knights of the Empire.'[11]

Some of the main features of the muscular Christian code were group loyalty, service to the community, equanimity under pressure, fair play and protection of the weak. As war approached, there would be increasing appeals to these values in the service of the Empire. An ethos of manly conduct would be transformed into an ethic of national service. Personal freedoms would be subordinated to the needs of State and Nation. An ethic that on balance had strengthened established democratic forms now seemingly threatened to help unleash a new nationalist authoritarianism.[12] T.É. Hulme would invoke that ethic in a significantly ambivalent way in his arguments on behalf of the war with Germany.[13]

The Fear of Mass Man

Liberal democracy run rampant was seen to be weakening not only the potential for national power, but also the level of intellectual life. There was a widespread fear that the liberalized society would elevate the mediocrity of 'mass man' and lead to a general loss of cultural standards. It was this fear that spawned a new elitism, as intellectuals sought to establish social structures that would protect their positions of privilege. The historian William Lecky defended the principle of hereditary aristocracy;[14] W.H. Mallock argued for the necessary rule of the 'inventive classes;'[15] Oscar Wilde, in a variation on a Nietzchean theme, asserted the need for slaves or machines to enable serious intellectual life;[16] and D.H. Lawrence, to the open-mouthed horror of Bertrand Russell, posited the notion of superior men, united by a special kinship of blood, born to rule in an hierarchical society.[17]

11 See Baden-Powell's pamphlet, *Young Knights of the Empire*, London 1916.
12 During and immediately after World War I, there was strong liberal and left-wing criticism of what was seen as the direct link between the muscular Christian tradition and narrow militaristic nationalism. In describing this perceived symbiosis, E.M. Forster would later coin the term 'Fabio-Fascism.'
13 See pp. 369–370 below.
14 W.E.H. Lecky, *Democracy and Liberty*, London–New York 1896.
15 W.H. Mallock, *Aristocracy and Evolution*, London 1898.
16 O. Wilde, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism,' *Fortnightly Review* (February 1891).
17 D.H. Lawrence to Bertrand Russell, in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, II: *June 1913–October 1916*, eds. G.J. Zytaruk and J.T. Boulton, Cambridge 1981, pp. 364–365 and 469–471; B. Russell, *Portraits from Memory*, London 1956, p. 105.

For Wyndham Lewis, who would later write a panegyric to the 'dynamic Hitler idea,' the superior man was the creative artist — and a slave society was essential to enable him to create. Lewis said bluntly that mass man must learn 'the art of being ruled.'[18] Here was another classic formulation of a reactionary politics in the service of a revolutionary art. Both the politics and the art had been given a theoretical basis by T.E. Hulme.

T.E. Hulme and the 'Religious Attitude'

For Hulme, liberal democracy's most fundamental and all-embracing flaw was the deadening materialism that gnawed at its base. Hulme's was probably the most sustained and profoundly based attack on the liberal democratic ideal in Britain, and it was also the most intellectually influential. The self-made savant, holding forth imperiously in his Soho rooms, gave shape to the half-intuited thoughts of a generation of young poets and artists. Among those whose minds he touched were Yeats, Pound, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein and Herbert Read. Virtually everybody who was anybody in London's young artistic and literary scene attended his regular Tuesday-night salons.[19] T.S. Eliot said that Hulme was the apostle of 'the twentieth-century mind.'[20] He brought together a wide knowledge of intellectual developments on the Continent and a blistering critique of three hundred years of liberal humanism. But where the efficiency advocates and the imperialists had attacked liberal humanism's material failings, Hulme attacked what he perceived as its monumental failure of spirit. Where others spurned it for a perceived inability to defend what was dear to them — the nation or its culture — Hulme opposed it primarily because it derived from what he saw as a series of blatantly false assumptions. Unlike the nationally and empirically based critiques, the inspiration for Hulme's critique lay on a cosmic, metaphysical level.

The entire edifice of humanism, said Hulme, was based on a central fallacy, a misapprehension of the nature of man. For the humanists, man had become the measure of all things. They took him for a creature of infinite capacity, whose continual growth would lead to continual progress. One result of this was the notion of an unbroken, linear

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18 W. Lewis, *Hitler*, London 1931; idem, *The Art of Being Ruled*, London 1926.
19 For biographical details on Hulme see A.R. Jones, *The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme*, London 1960.
20 T.S. Eliot in *The Criterion*, no. 11 (7 April 1924), p. 232.

advance of science: another was the belief in an unbroken enhancement of personal freedoms.[21] Indeed, the humanistic political ideal had become 'the removal of everything that checks the "spontaneous growth of personality."' The humanists 'had been taught by Rousseau that man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws that suppressed him.' They believed infinite progress was possible and that order was 'a merely negative conception.' The political consequence was an unbridled and nefarious libertarianism.[22]

The trouble was that modern man with his linear, mechanical mind had become a slave to the notions of progress and continuity. With the diffusion of nineteenth-century materialism, this view of the universe as a continuity had become almost second nature. It had led to a deeply-ingrained habit of mind that was unable to accept gaps in experience. To resuscitate a culture based on truth, it was imperative that man relearn the notion of discontinuity.[23]

The epistemological problem could be solved by recognizing the division of the world into three distinct and separate spheres: the inorganic world of mathematical and physical science; the organic world of biology, history and social science; and the world of ethical and religious values. The first and last dealt in absolutes, while the concepts of the world of living things were essentially relative.[24] True, some European thinkers had lately come a long way from the mechanical view of the world of living things, recognizing the chasm between the worlds of life and of matter, between the vital and the mechanical. But they had not gone far enough and had failed, ultimately, to distinguish between the vital and the religious.

According to Hulme, modern man completely misunderstood the nature of religion. A proper understanding would entail breaking with 'the whole Renaissance tradition.'[25] As things were, modern man almost automatically saw the world through Renaissance 'pseudo-categories.' He had to be shown that the Renaissance attitude was only one possible subjective *Weltanschauung*; that it was derived from a particular historical circumstance; that it in turn coloured the entire

21 T.E. Hulme, 'Humanism and the Religious Attitude,' in idem, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (first published posthumously in 1924), ed. Herbert Read, London 1960, pp. 55 and 48.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 48; idem, 'Romanticism and Classicism,' in *Speculations* (previous note), p. 116.
23 Idem, *Speculations* (above, note 21), pp. 3–4.
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
25 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

economic and cultural life of the period; and that, ultimately, it was based on a fallacy. 'The fundamental error,' said Hulme, 'is that of placing Perfection in humanity, thus giving rise to that bastard thing Personality and all the bunkum that follows from it.'[26]

Perfection was possible only in the sphere of the religious. Medieval man had understood this, as he had perceived the 'shallowness' of any other attitude. Indeed, Hulme was no ethical relativist. Quite simply, the difference between the humanist and the religious attitudes was that one was true and the other was not. To shake modern man out of his intellectual stupor, his 'humanist naiveté,' Hulme advised using what he called the 'historical method.'[27] As he said:

> It is possible by examining the history of the Renaissance to destroy in the mind of the humanist, the conviction that his own attitude is the *inevitable* attitude of the emancipated and instructed man.[28]

The difference between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was fundamentally the difference between two conceptions of man: the first period was religious, the second humanist. In the first period, men really believed in the dogma of original sin; in the second, they did not. The entire nature of civilization at any given period was predicated on the difference between the implications of these two basic assumptions. Each period had correspondingly consistent approaches to economics and to art and culture. Renaissance art was 'vital,' depending as it did on pleasure aroused by the reproduction of human forms; Byzantine art was 'geometrical,' reflecting a disgust with the trivial and accidental characteristics of living shapes.[29]

The signs in the early twentieth century of a return to a more geometrical art seemed to Hulme to presage a return to the non-humanistic, antiromantic worldview which, with some misgivings, he called neo-classical. But it would not be a simple return to medievalism. The humanistic period had developed 'an honesty in science, and a certain conception of freedom of thought and action which will remain.'[30] Nor would there be any change in man. There would be no 'new men;' indeed, the greatest hope for a transformation of society

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
29 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
30 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

away from the errors of humanism and Romanticism lay precisely in man's constancy.[31]

A feature of man's constancy was his need for belief in a deity. The perverted rhetoric of rationalist materialism repressed these instincts, but they had to come out in some way. So when man could no longer believe in God, he began to believe that he himself was a god. 'You don't believe in heaven,' said Hulme, 'so you begin to believe in heaven on earth. In other words you get Romanticism.' Take away God and you get humanism; take away religion and you get Romanticism. Perfection had been doubly misplaced. Romanticism, according to Hulme, was nothing but 'spilt religion.'[32]

There was just one course for modern man. He must internalize the dogma of original sin and recognize man's fundamental weakness and imperfectibility. Otherwise he would find himself trapped in the errors of personality, sentimentality and licentiousness. Politically, these errors were enshrined in the principles and values of the French revolution. And that, Hulme said, was why the French neo-classicists, especially Maurras, Lasserre and the Action française, so vehemently rejected 1789 and all that it represented.[33] It stemmed from a mechanistic view of the universe and led inevitably to a cultural decadence, devoid of any true spiritual content. Envisioning a materialistic desert, a cultural wasteland, Hulme desperately sought an alternative.

To this end, Hulme developed a binary *Weltanschauung*, a dialectic of opposites. If the anthropocentric humanistic view was a Romantic illusion, he would posit an antithetical Classicism. If Romanticism was based on an inherent optimism, Classicism took the pessimistic view. Man was not the measure of all things, but a poor, sinful being of limited ability. He was guilty of original sin — a fallen creature in an imperfect and imperfectible world. Personality was not to be developed, but submerged. History was not an account of man's linear progress, but a circular dialectic, governed by the two antithetical views of man. Periods of Romanticism were destined to be followed by periods of Classicism. The Middle Ages had been a spiritual, religious period, while the Renaissance had ushered in a godless, secular materialism — which now, thankfully, was coming to an end. Hulme's great symbol, the wheel,[34] was about to turn again.

31 *Ibid.*
32 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

That turn would affect not only the nature of society and culture, but also that of politics. Politically, Hulme, by his own account, was 'a certain kind of Tory.'[35] T.S. Eliot admiringly called him 'classical, reactionary and revolutionary ... the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant and democratic mind of the last century.'[36] Classicism meant tradition and discipline, without which fallen man could achieve nothing. It was, Hulme said, only 'by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him.'[37] In the classical view, the ultimate evil was disorder; disciplined hierarchy, *a priori*, was good. Rules and tradition established the forms for maintaining an ordered society. Moreover, tradition was a creative force. Hulme said that 'the experience of several generations of artists has traced the limits outside which one can produce nothing solid or excellent.' The rules may be of no value without genius — 'but there is in them more of genius than there is in any great genius himself.'[38]

For the Romantics, the place of tradition could be taken by reason, which they saw as a kind of divine faculty that would enable man to alter his own nature and ascend to higher forms. But the Tory view of the constancy of man's nature meant, in Hulme's words, that 'any scheme of social regeneration which presupposes that he can alter is doomed to bring about nothing but disaster.'[39] Socialism was out; so too was the new liberalism. But so, too, for the very same reason, was any nascent Fascism. Hulme's political persuasion was a radical religious conservatism, and in Britain this almost invariably meant drawing back from any truck with Fascism. In the European context, it would lead him to the work of Georges Sorel and Henri Bergson.

Hulme and Sorel

It was important for Hulme to assert that his 'Toryism' was not reactionary, and he believed that association with Georges Sorel, described by Hulme as 'revolutionary in economics but classical in ethics,' would support this claim. For one thing, Sorel and the group of writers connected with the Action française demonstrated that

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35 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
36 T.E. Hulme, 'A Tory Philosophy,' in Jones, *Life and Opinions* (above, note 19), p. 187. The article was first published in five parts in *The Commentator*, IV, nos. 97–98 and 101–103 (April–May 1912).
37 T.S. Eliot in *The Criterion* (*loc. cit.*, above, note 20).
38 Jones, *Life and Opinons* (above, note 19), p. 190.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

disillusion with liberal democracy was a Europe-wide phenomenon and not a personal quirk; for another, Sorel could prove 'an emancipator' for those who shrank from the opposing conservative ideology because of their preconceived notions of its reactionary connotations.[40] Normally, these liberals would have dismissed Sorelian views as a disguised attempt to defend the interests of wealth. But this was an impossible gambit with the syndicalist Sorel. These 'pacifist progressives' found it difficult to come to terms with a revolutionary who was antidemocratic, took an absolutist view on ethics, valued the mystical element in religion and was contemptuous of modernity and progress. They were constitutionally incapable of taking the anti-democratic view seriously. They felt, Hulme said, 'just as if someone had denied one of the laws of thought, or asserted that two and two are five.'[41]

But Sorel, by means of a Hulmean historical analysis, had loosened the hold of so-called necessary concepts on the mind. He had shown, *inter alia*, that there was no necessary connection between the working-class movement and its socialist ideology. The ideology was nothing but a form of liberal democracy which Sorel felt would be fatal to the movement. As Hulme put it:

> Liberal Socialism is still living on the remains of middle-class thought of the last century. When vulgar thought of to-day is pacifist, rationalist, and hedonist, and in being so believes itself to be expressing the inevitable convictions of the instructed and emancipated man, it has all the pathos of marionettes in a play, dead things gesticulating as though they were alive.[42]

The regeneration of society would never be achieved by peaceful and intelligent readjustment on the part of literary men and politicians; 'It is,' said Hulme, 'rather an heroic task requiring heroic qualities ... virtues which are not likely to flourish on the soil of a rational and sceptical ethic.' Indeed, it required actions springing from an ethic that was absolute and a conviction that was deeply religious. Sorel had understood this; and this was what his concept of myth as a motivating force for social change was all about. He, too, anticipated a return of the classical spirit.[43]

40 'Reflections on Violence,' in *Speculations* (above, note 21).
41 *Ibid.*, pp. 251–252.
42 *Ibid.*, pp. 254–255.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Hulme and Bergson

If Sorel gave Hulme intellectual tools to change the world, Bergson gave him more sophisticated instruments for understanding it. What Bergson did for Hulme was invaluable; he showed him the way out of the slough of mechanistic despond. Discovering Bergson, he said, gave him

> ... an almost physical sense of exhilaration, a sudden expansion, a kind of mental explosion. It gave one a sense of giddiness that comes with a sudden lifting up to a great height. ... If I compare my nightmare to imprisonment in a small cell, then the door of that cell was for the first time thrown open. In the second place, the key with which this prison door was opened corresponded to the type of key which I had always imagined would open it.[44]

In Bergson's view, the ordinary use of logical intellect distorted the world, making the existence of a chain of mechanistic linkage seem irrefutable. While the intellect could deal adequately with material forces, it was hopelessly incapable of understanding the forces of life or the spirit. Living organisms moved to the beat of a different drummer, and understanding them required the use of another, very different faculty of mind — what Bergson called 'intuition.' It was through intuition that the fundamental self was capable of truly creative acts, and it was through intuition that man could be said to be really free.[45]

And this was not all. Bergson had struck another mighty blow against materialism with his theory of creative evolution. As he described it, the *élan vital*, the life force in all matter, tending towards ever greater self-consciousness and freedom, found in man its highest earthly form.[46]

Wyndham Lewis, whom the ebullient Hulme had once hung upside-down from his trouser legs, was not slow to see the inconsistency here. Progress was being reintroduced through the back door, and so was what Lewis took to be a very unclassical irrationalism.[47] But, nevertheless, Bergson's thought was decisive for Hulme, for it made possible a seemingly scientific and confident belief in the spirit and

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44 T.E. Hulme, 'Notes on Bergson,' in *Further Speculations*, ed. S. Hynes, Minneapolis 1955, pp. 29–30. The 'Notes' were published in five parts in the *New Age*, IX–X (October 1911–February 1912).

45 Idem, 'Intensive Manifolds,' in *Speculations* (above, note 21), pp. 180–194.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 203–204, 208–209.

47 Jones, *Life and Opinions* (above, note 19), p. 123; W. Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, London 1927, passim.

in spiritual values. By philosophically banishing the nightmare of the mechanistic universe, Bergson had enabled Hulme to put his religious faith on a firm intellectual footing.

Heroic Values

For Hulme, it was the life of the spirit and the religious attitude that made adherence to heroic values possible. Materialism, because of its undercutting of spiritual values, inevitably bred cynicism and despair. As Hulme said,

> ... in such a world, the word value has clearly no meaning. There cannot be any good or bad in such a turmoil of atoms. .... If this view of the world is the true one, all the bottom drops out of our set of values. The very touch of such a conception freezes all the values and kills them.[48]

The religious attitude made national feeling possible, and with it the defence of national ideals and the heroic mode in time of war. This conception led to another of the many clashes between Hulme and Bertrand Russell, this one documented in a public exchange in the *Cambridge Magazine*.[49] Hulme attacked Russell's pacifism as an expression of the moral bankruptcy of the materialist. There was nothing spiritual that Russell really believed in, and therefore nothing he believed worth fighting or dying for. Indeed, as a humanist, he elevated the preservation of human life above all values. But Hulme asserted that fighting for a certain way of life was more important than life itself. The war with Germany was precisely such a fight, and therefore was justified.

The pacifists, Hulme said, toyed lightly with the concept of liberty when they argued against conscription, calling it a denial of individual freedom. The danger to liberty from conscription — or even from the restrictive Defence of the Realm Act — was 'infinitesimal in comparison with the loss of liberty that would follow our defeat.'[50]

And so, paradoxically, Hulme, in his advocacy of the heroic against the calculating materialism of the liberal humanist, now found himself defending the same democratic ideals he had so staunchly attacked.

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48 *Further Speculations* (above, note 44), p. 53.
49 The articles and letters appeared in *Cambridge Magazine*, V, between January and March 1916.
50 T.E. Hulme, 'On Liberty,' in *Further Speculations* (above, note 44), p. 170.

This ambivalence was typical of the radical right in Britain. Like J.A. Cramb, whose warlike *Germany and England* had been a runaway best-seller in 1914, Hulme now justified war and violence in the name of the same quiescent British liberal-democratic tradition that he had previously been at such pains to undermine.[51] Where Sorel, on the Continent, glorified military heroism as elevating human dignity, Hulme saw it simply as a necessary means to maintain the liberal lesser evil.

Hulme rejected the liberal view that Germany would inevitably move towards democracy. On the contrary, it would impose its authoritarian system on all conquered peoples. A German victory would be an event of major historic proportions, like the Reformation, and would change the face of Europe for at least half a century. It must be resisted at all costs. Democracy was not an inevitable law, like the law of gravitation; it had to be fought for. Again, one of the most nefarious habits of thought in this context was the belief in the inevitability of progress. If the world was inevitably making for good, then good could never be in serious danger. According to Hulme, this led 'to a disinclination to see how big, fundamental things like liberty can in any way depend on trivial, material things like guns.' While Russell conceded that spiritual things might be worth fighting for, he claimed that they could not, by definition, be moved by force. This was absurd, said Hulme: the idea of liberty was resistant to force, but not the fact of liberty. Force could and should be used to defend it.[52]

The false concept of progress, Hulme explained, had led to the belief that wars should be fought only for some obvious good — like, for instance, the abolition of capitalism. But war may simply and justifiably be fought against the spread of an evil greater than the status quo. 'From time to time,' Hulme said, 'great and useless sacrifices become necessary, merely that whatever precarious "good" the world has achieved may just be preserved.'[53] Despite Russell's protestations to the contrary, the difference between the pacifists and those who believed in the war was the difference between two opposing ethical systems.[54]

51 J.A. Cramb, *Germany and England*, London 1914.
52 See Hulme's essays, 'On Liberty' and 'Inevitability Inapplicable,' in *Further Speculations* (above, note 44), pp. 170–178.
53 Idem, 'Why We Are in Favour of This War,' in *Further Speculations* (above, note 44), p. 184.
54 Idem, 'North Staffs Resents Mr. Russell's Rejoinder,' in *Further Speculations* (above, note 44), pp. 197–198.

Russell's rational humanism, whose fundamental values were life and personality, led naturally to pacifism. Concepts like honour were regarded as mere empty words, while war and national defence were atavistic throwbacks to man's most primitive instincts. As such, they were irrational. Preservation of human life at all costs and in all circumstances was the highest of moral goals.

In the more heroic or tragic ethical system, however, values were objective and not simply relative to life. Sacrifice of life was not always morally wrong. As Hulme saw it, many values were objectively higher than life:

> In a moment, when a man, after much weighing of motives suddenly brushing calculations on one side ... sees clearly that this is an absolute value, and must be accepted as absolute, above calculation ... and superior to values based on life and personality ... then, I think it wrong to say that he has been moved by some underlying atavistic impulse which has suddenly come to the surface. On the contrary, I should say that he was understanding the nature of ethics for the first time.[55]

The rationalists knew that this heroism was the 'central nerve' of the ethic they opposed, and so they lampooned and ridiculed it. Conversely, it was a belief in the truth of heroic values that led many to rebel against the rational, utilitarian ethic. Again, it was a rebellion of spirit against matter, of objective spiritual value against a self-seeking and expedient calculus. Ultimately, it signalled the difference between religious and secular. For it was man's sense of the religious that was at the base of the heroic values.[56]

Hulme's Ambivalence

Hulme had laid an intellectual foundation for right-wing, religious authoritarianism — but not, significantly, for a Germanic statism, or, indeed, for Fascism. His critique of liberal democracy was riddled with ambiguity. He conceded that the humanist period had made social and political advances, not to be reversed. Its open-minded scientific empiricism and its freedom of thought and action ought to be maintained.[57] But surely these were the very core values of

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55 Idem, 'North Staffs Continues Where He Left Off,' in *Further Speculations* (above, note 44), p. 201.
56 *Ibid.*, pp. 201–205.
57 *Speculations* (above, note 21), p. 58.

liberal humanism, and, indeed, of the Renaissance. How could they be reconciled with Hulme's demand for passive acceptance of dogma and tradition?

Moreover, as we have seen, this arch-critic of liberal democracy and all its works was to become, by implication, one of its most unabashed champions in time of war. His underlying argument was that Britain was prosecuting the war precisely for the sake of retaining liberal values and the liberal way of life. Preservation of an open society had become a value greater than life itself. Hulme was thus consistent in opposing humanism, but not its liberal adjunct.

In the war, the heroic values which Hulme claimed to uphold were precisely those of the nineteenth-century muscular Christian tradition, part of which he rejected for the shallowness of its religious understanding. That tradition itself was highly ambivalent. It provided a model for a heroic nationalism, but at the same time prescribed clear and cogent limits to what might be considered gentlemanly conduct — limits that were totally incompatible with Fascist barbarism.

Furthermore, if other critiques of nineteenth-century materialism often moved toward a merit-based elitism, Hulme's never did. In his view, no political theory that was not 'fully moved by the conception of justice asserting the equality of men and which cannot offer something to all men, deserves or is likely to have any future.'[58] But most importantly, Hulme's classicist authoritarianism in many ways contradicted the inherent Romanticism of the Fascist approach. The vision of fallen and limited man ran counter to romanticized, Fascist notions of the hero or leader, while the theory of human constancy precluded any notion of 'new men.'

Finally, Hulme's separation of the spheres meant that any Fascist-like claim for perfection in the human sphere of politics would be seen as spurious and muddle-headed. As Hugh Kingsmill was later to warn, 'The attempt to externalize the kingdom of heaven in temporal shape must end in disaster.'[59] And that most important of Hulmean disciples, T.S. Eliot, was surely echoing the master when he pronounced: 'There is a form of faith which is solely appropriate to a religion; it should not be appropriated by politics.'[60] A Fascism that falsely arrogated absolutes to itself would be spurned; Hulme wanted authoritarianism

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58 *Ibid.*, p. 259.
59 H. Kingsmill, *The Best of Hugh Kingsmill*, ed. Michael Holroyd, London 1970, p. 19.
60 T.S. Eliot, in *The Criterion*, VIII, no. 31 (December 1928), p. 282.

and discipline to create a deeper awareness of a sphere that was beyond politics.

But if Hulme did not draw the full antidemocratic implication of his authoritarian creed, some of his disciples did. Eliot, Pound, Yeats and Lewis had no time for political egalitarianism. All would expound new elitist forms. But only in Pound's case would this actually mean a Fascist commitment.

After Hulme

T.E. Hulme died in 1917, killed in the war he had so resolutely defended. His intellectual mantle would pass to the poet T.S. Eliot. Scrupulously faithful to the master he had never met, Eliot did more than anyone else to give Hulme's ideas greater currency and respectability. It was Eliot who, in his work, brilliantly realized Hulme's classicist poetics and gave authoritative voice to a conservative politics, steeped in tradition. The magazine he edited, *The Criterion*, was for 'pure Toryism' in a world 'worm-eaten with liberalism.' He was, by his own description, a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-Catholic in religion.[61] He fully accepted Hulme's notion of original sin, with all its aesthetic, social and political implications. Like Hulme, Eliot bemoaned the moral wasteland of materialism, and tried to redefine the meaning of religious experience and Christian culture.[62] He preached an authoritarian traditionalism governed by King and Church.

Communism as an expression of materialism was anathema to him, while Fascism fell short as an elevation of spirit. It was in the end no more than 'an Italian regime for Italians, a product of the Italian mind.'[63] The answer to modern decadence was not Fascism but Christian society, properly understood.

But as war with Germany again approached, Eliot, like Hulme before him, began to see the merits of the open society and rejected the totalitarian alternative as 'a state of affairs in which we shall have regimentation and conformity, without respect for the needs of the individual soul ... uniformity of opinion through propaganda, and art only encouraged when it flatters the official doctrines of the time.'[64]

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61 Idem, Preface to *For Lancelot Andrews*, London 1928, p. 9.
62 Idem, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, London 1939.
63 Quoted in Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919-1945*, New York 1971, p. 276.
64 T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' in *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward, Harmondsworth 1963, p. 198.

Like so many intellectuals on the right of British politics, Eliot ultimately was unable to reconcile the twin drives for an authoritarian social order and for uninhibited artistic freedom.

Another disciple of Hulme's who went further in his flirtation with Fascism was the editor of the *English Review*, the Catholic, Conservative intellectual Douglas Jerrold. He, too, sought a spiritual solution to the problems of a material age. This most political of literary contemporaries thought that Parliament should be reformed and society reconstituted, possibly along the corporatist lines proposed by Mussolini for Italy. He advocated a return to the aristocratic values that had held sway prior to the French Revolution. He rejected the muscular Christian ethos of the public schools as a great leveller that destroyed the truly heroic in man. 'The leaders and the led,' said Jerrold, 'were all of a pattern.'[65] What was needed was a new authoritarianism, nurtured by the pre-French Revolution aristocratic spirit. But in the end he did not find it — nor, he thought, after a visit to the Fascist Black House, had Oswald Mosley. As he wrote, 'British Fascism was simply a party machine without a party, the spiritual curse of the age, without its secular justification.'[66] It had the power to destroy, but lacked the subtlety to create. Again, a radical British conservatism, seeking a more organic and spiritual community, had revealed the limits of its revolutionary drive. Indeed, when Jerrold made his own bid for political power, it was through the agency of the Conservative Party — and despite his assault on parliament and his advocacy of corporatism, he resolutely declined to call his more vigorous alternative by the name of Fascism.[67]

William Butler Yeats also hankered for a return to more aristocratic forms. Democracy was corrupt and corrupting, in that its leaders pandered to the masses, who in any event were totally unfit to choose their leaders. Only an aristocracy bred over centuries to rule could maintain standards. Democracy had merely unleashed anarchy on the world; it was time for the rule of the few to replace the rule of the many. It was time for the 'second coming' — for the return of the philosopher kings, and for the Hulmean turn of the gyre of history that would introduce the new, harsh, authoritarian, 'surgical' order. But for Yeats, too, that would not be Fascism; he would ultimately turn away

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65 See Douglas Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure*, London 1937, pp. 198–199.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 341–348; R. Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933–1939*, Oxford 1983, pp. 46–49.

from General O'Duffy in disgust at the vulgar crudity of what he had initially taken to be an elitist movement.[68]

And Wyndham Lewis, who would meet Oswald Mosley with his coat collar furtively turned up so as not to be stigmatized by association, would turn away from Hitler. His admiring 'Hitler' of 1931 became the disillusioned 'Hitler Cult' of 1939. He was repelled, as he said, by Fascism's 'mass hysteria.' It was the gratuitous violence and the common crudity that the elitist Lewis could not stomach. The same anti-democratic elitism that had led him to Fascism finally turned him against it. Fascism was too crude and vulgar for the aristocratic spirit. Like Yeats, Lewis wanted a return to the rule of the gifted few, the philosopher kings. For him, however, the hereditary aristocracy was politically *passé*. The gifted few would somehow emerge from the society as a whole, perhaps with some eugenic help. The materialist threat inherent in democracy had to be warded off not by a new politics of the masses but by the creation of new elitist forms.[69] But as to the key question of how to create a mass base for an elitist politics, neither Jerrold nor Yeats nor Wyndham Lewis had any answer.

The great materialist threat in 1920s Britain was, of course, not liberalism but 'Bolshevism.' Right-wing groups, among them the first British *Fascisti*, formed to fight the 'Godless reds.' Their objective correlative in the world of literature was 'Sapper's' Bulldog Drummond. Here was a popular, much-read proto-Fascist authoritarian form. But like the organizations he mirrored, Drummond was no Fascist revolutionary. Indeed, he was a right-wing prop to what he saw as a feeble and enfeebling regime. Post-war Britain, in 'Sapper's' view, lacked the political will to fight its devious and unscrupulous enemies on the left; it needed encouragement and help. So Drummond's 'Black Gang,' no less, schooled in war and willing to apply its methods in civilian England, was formed by his tough right-wing public school chums — but only to assist the establishment, not to tear it down.[70]

And, significantly, the literary generation that grew up reading 'Bulldog Drummond' moved from political apathy to a flirtation with authoritarian forms — and to subsequent rebellion against them. They

68 See W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, London 1955; A. Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism*, New York 1971, p. 280.

69 Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, London 1968, p. 225; P.W. Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Hitler* (both above, note 18); idem, *The Hitler Cult*, London 1939.

70 See 'Sapper's' Bulldog Drummond novels, especially *The Black Gang*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1922.

suffered, as Stephen Spender put it, from the 'destructive element,' buffeted about in a post-war world whose value system had been eroded.[71]

The best self-documented case of this spiritual saga is Christopher Isherwood's. Wracked with guilt at not having served in the war, Isherwood devised tests for his manhood. One was to tear about at great speed on a motorcycle. He would later write that he was easy prey, at this stage of his life, for the cooed message of a ruthless dictator.[72] His friend, the poet W.H. Auden, saw all around him a 'sick England' — and believed that the metaphorical 'helmeted airman' might prove its saviour.[73] Such youthful intellectual flirtation with the Fascist strongman led many, including Isherwood, to Oswald Mosley's New Party. But they were repelled by the nascent violence, by what they saw as the emergence of the 'cloven hoof' of Fascism,[74] and they quickly moved away from the remedies of the right to the more coherent promise of the left. By the early 30s, young dons and undergraduates were virtually all moving leftward in unison. John Cornford would read Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and be converted to Marxism.[75] And for Auden, now a 'Communist to Others,' the strongman was no longer the saviour, but very much a part of the disease.[76] With the outbreak of hostilities in Spain, the Eliot and Auden literary generations would often find themselves on opposite sides of the political fence.[77]

But in literary terms, the Auden generation worshipped the work of Eliot, Yeats and Pound. They, too, through Eliot, had imbibed the pure poetic ideas of T.E. Hulme. They, too, would strive for a hard classical style in which personality was totally submerged. When they allowed their left-wing politics to inform their poetic drive, they felt a sense of self-betrayal. They were in violation of modernist ideals. They were aware that the Bloomsbury liberals, for example, sympathized with their anti-Fascist stand — but were 'horrified at the idea of poetry being compromised by politics.' And in this, according to Stephen Spender,

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71 S. Spender, *The Destructive Element*, London 1935, p. 12.
72 C. Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (1938), pp. 46–52, La Jolla, Calif., 1979.
73 W.H. Auden, *The Orators: An English Study*, London 1932.
74 C.M. Joad, quoted in R. Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, London 1981, p. 261.
75 S. Spender, *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People 1933–1975*, London 1978, p. 24.
76 See W.H. Auden, 'Psychology and Art Today,' in G. Grigson (ed.), *The Arts Today*, London 1935.
77 See, for example, 'Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War,' *Left Review Pamphlet*, London 1937.

the young left-wing radicals gathered around the Auden group 'secretly identified with the generation of E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.' They were just as committed to an apolitical poetic truth as the scientist was to the apolitical nature of his laboratory experiments. It was this inherently tentative liberal attitude that would lead them away not only from Fascism, but eventually from Communism as well. They had not, as Louis MacNeice would put it, 'been born for dogma.'[78]

The Old Lie

The antimaterialist tradition of which Hulme was a part found at least four major right-wing intellectual forms in post-World War I Britain: Eliot's advocacy of the Christian society, Jerrold's and Yeats's hankering for a new aristocracy, Lewis's elitist rule by the gifted and 'Sapper's' determined stand against Bolshevism in the name of the values of old England. But when the crunch came, the intellectuals who came of age in the thirties by and large rejected all four rightist messages as reactionary hogwash that tended towards Fascism.

During World War I, the public school muscular Christian ethos had come under fire. The disparity between its romanticized myth of combat and the reality of Flanders Fields did much to undermine its romantic strongman rhetoric. For Isherwood and Auden, the 'truly strong man' would no longer be the publicly acclaimed *Boys Own Paper* style hero, but the man of inner integrity.[79] This heralded a conscious turning away from an overtly public morality to a more private one; in political terms, it meant more emphasis on individual rights and a determination to fight for democratic values. In intellectual terms, it ultimately led away from Communism and towards George Orwell's critique of 'big brother' totalitarianism.

Any possibility of a serious political development of Hulme's authoritarian ideas soon eroded in the inter-war period. The strong liberal tradition in Britain created an inherent ambivalence in right-wing attitudes. The muscular Christian code's central values of group loyalty, fair play and protection of the weak continued to encourage loyalty to traditional democratic forms and to prescribe strict limits to any right-wing radicalism. The liberal-left critique of the code, based as it was on a deepening commitment to individual freedoms and a critique of the code's national and statist elements, also played a

78 Spender, *The Thirties and After* (above, note 75), pp. 16, 32, 190, 33.
79 Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows* (above, note 72), p. 60.

role in strengthening democratic consciousness. Cultural thesis and antithesis both conspired against an already ambivalent right-wing authoritarianism. Thus, when World War II broke out, it could almost universally be seen in England as a war on behalf of freedom and democracy, against an antidemocratic statist authoritarianism.

Germany, said the liberal E.M. Forster, was not a hostile country but a hostile principle.[80] On the right, men like Esmé Wingfield-Stratford argued that freedom was nothing less than Britain's *raison d'être*; it was 'the soul of her civilization.' The choice in the war with Hitler, said Wingfield-Stratford, was 'in the deepest sense between life and death.'[81] In this right-wing defence of a liberal system, he was simply echoing T.E. Hulme from twenty years earlier. For these radical conservatives, despite all their authoritarian rhetoric, the idea of England, which included a basic commitment to democratic freedoms, was an inseparable part of their value system.

80 E.M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), Harmondsworth 1965, p. 41.
81 Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *The Foundations of British Patriotism*, London 1939, pp. 414 and 419, in the 1940 Right Book Club Edition.

CONCLUSION

Yehoshua Arieli

Concluding Remarks at the Close of an Era

Commemorating the tenth anniversary of the death of Jacob Talmon
with a colloquium on 'The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democ-
racy' is a fitting epilogue to the bicentennial celebrations of the French
Revolution recently held around the world. For Talmon and for most
of the intellectuals considered in this volume, who revolted against
the spirit and the basic patterns of the evolving modern society, the
French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment which inspired and
informed its tenets were of decisive historical importance. For both,
liberalism and democracy were central to their evaluation of the course
of modern history.

Moreover, all of us assembled here are deeply aware that the present
moment represents a unique historical vantage point for regarding the
problem-complex which was the subject of Talmon's life work, and
which preoccupied the minds of the antiliberal intellectuals. As we
witness the passing of an era and the opening of new horizons, we
may see the issues discussed here in a new perspective.

Though Talmon and the critics of modern society were largely agreed
as to the centrality of the French Revolution and of the issue of liberal
democracy in the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they
had opposing reasons for their evaluations. For the latter, the trends
spawned by the Enlightenment — its universalistic and atomistic
concepts of man and society, its rationalistic psychology, shaped after
the model of Newtonian or Lockean science, and its hedonistic or
utilitarian morality — expressed the cultural and political patterns
and lifestyle of bourgeois society. These trends were reflected in the
deadening spirit of liberal democracy and were the cause of the total
alienation of the camp of social and national revolution. Moreover, they
heralded the dissolution of all the vital powers of the community and
of the individual, the loss of leadership and of a sense of direction and
meaning. They would lead, eventually, to anarchy, to nihilism, and, as
some saw it, to revolutions and to Caesarism.

Talmon, on the other hand, conceived of the basic concepts of the
Enlightenment as the true continuation of the heritage of the West, with

its Judeo-Christian and classical views of man. He saw the universalistic concepts of the equality and dignity of human beings, of their freedom and right to self-determination, as growing directly out of that heritage. These concepts were inherent in the ideals of liberal democracy, which, guided by experience and by a pragmatic attitude towards the realm of human life, remained man's last and best hope.

Yet it was not liberal democracy which became the subject of Talmon's lifelong study of modern history, but rather another aspect of the Enlightenment: its promise of the redemption and perfection of man; its beliefs that humanity had the power to shape its destiny and that history was the stage where the redemption of humanity was to be enacted. This was the promise which created the great revolutionary movements of the last two hundred years and shaped the totalitarian ideologies of the left and the right in the twentieth century.[1] In this context, Talmon viewed the French Revolution as a paradigmatic and decisive event. Here, according to Talmon, the attempt was made to enact the Enlightenment's promise of universal redemption and to create totally comprehensive frameworks of human existence, which he summed up under the terms 'totalitarian democracy' and 'political messianism.'

There is no doubt that the vision of a liberated humanity, as first conceived, perhaps, by Francis Bacon, is a central component in the make-up of the modern mind and in the ideological forces of modern history. Kant defined the message of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as 'Der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmundigkeit.'[2] This future-directedness, the promise of the self-emancipation of human beings as individuals and as a species, combined with the Promethean new awareness of their power to shape their future, characterized not only the great ideological movements of the right and the left — that is, political messianism and totalitarian democracy; they inspired the emancipatory ideologies and orientations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They inhered in liberalism and liberal democracy, but also, to a great degree, in the tenets and views of the intellectuals discussed in these pages. For this is the very soul of modern history and its fundamental drive: the

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1 This interpretation of Jacob Talmon's thought is based on my essay 'Jacob Talmon — An Intellectual Portrait,' in *Totalitarian Democracy and After: International Colloquium in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon*, Jerusalem 1984.

2 I. Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist die Aufklarung' (1783), in idem, *Was ist die Aufklarung? Thesen, Definitionen*, ed. E.B.P. Reclam, Stuttgart 1974.

unprecedented endeavour of humanity to master its fate and build its future, through the mobilization of the actual and potential powers and capacities with which it is endowed.

The difference between totalitarian ideologies and other ideological trends is thus a matter not of their attitudes toward the future but of the values, basic conceptions and fundamental attitudes toward politics and society inherent in each of them. According to Talmon, the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were inspired by an ideological mentality, which, in seeking to change the face of history and society by means of political action, had all the characteristics of secular, messianic religion. Only if one realized the tremendous force and fervour of this faith could one understand the ruthlessness with which its followers pursued its realization and the inevitable perversions which succeeded attempts to translate such visions into reality.

Though Talmon's study stressed the antithetical character of totalitarian democracy and political messianism to liberal democracy, he emphasized again and again the blood relationship between them, as common offspring of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The purpose of Talmon's first book, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, was to account for the emergence of a messianic totalitarian democratic ideology out of the universalistic background of the radical and idealistic Enlightenment. Talmon sought to explain the bifurcation of the trends of liberal democracy and totalitarianism out of a common climate of opinion which emphasized the quest for freedom and sought to establish, on the basis of the unity of humankind, the existential equality and dignity of all human beings. In his words:

> Both [the liberal and the totalitarian] schools affirm the supreme value of Liberty. But whereas the one finds the essence of freedom in spontaneity and the absence of coercion, the other believes it to be realized only in the pursuit and attainment of an absolute collective purpose.[3]

Despite his condemnation of the prophets of political messianism as 'saviours-in-a-hurry,' an underlying regret could be felt, as though he were dealing with aberrations of something that was basically decent — as though, in political messianism, the myths of Prometheus and of Lucifer were inextricably bound together.[4]

3   J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London 1960, pp. 2–3.
4   Idem, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, London 1981, p. 536.

Talmon's evaluation of the relationship between universalistically oriented totalitarian democracy and liberal democracy changed considerably during the thirty years which passed between the first and the last volumes of his trilogy on totalitarian democracy. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, first published in 1952, was stamped by the perspectives elicited by the outcome of World War II and the onset of the Cold War. It is clear that Talmon intended his full study of political messianism to deal exclusively with the evolution of the ideology and mentality of the world Communist movement of his own time.

Talmon's singular reconstruction and reinterpretation of the last two hundred years from the vantage point of the mid-twentieth century led him to ascribe to that period's other great ideological force and mass movement, nationalism, a character and mental-emotional structure similar to that which he ascribed to the left: the tendency toward a secular messianism and a totalitarian democratic mentality. This was the thesis of the second part of his trilogy, and there was undoubtedly much truth in it. Rousseau and the French Revolution may be viewed as a potent source of the concept of the nation and of nationalism, while the American Revolution exemplifies the close connection between the Enlightenment concept of the rights of man and the right to national self-determination. However, this parallel notion could not be maintained with respect to the romantic concept of the nation or the *Volk* as the ultimate framework of belonging, and to the attendant doctrine of the primacy of the group mind and group will. Talmon became increasingly preoccupied with the historical significance of racial, secular antisemitism and the emergence of a totalitarian racialist and biological ideology. This led him to highlight the irreconcilable opposition between the universalistic assumptions of the liberal worldview and of revolutionary socialism, on the one hand, and the organistic, biological and vitalistic ideologies of nationalism, Fascism and antirationalistic elitism, on the other.

Indeed, in his later work, and particularly in the third part of his trilogy, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of the Revolution*, Talmon emphasized the deadly antagonism of the totalitarian movements of nationalism and Fascism and of their antiliberal and antirationalistic precursors and satellites to communism — an antagonism which stemmed from their negation both of the values of a pluralistic liberal order and of the universalistic message of communism. His growing acquaintance with the work and theories of psychoanalysis, of social psychology and of the sociology of knowledge, coupled with his ever-deepening apprehension of the unimaginable suffering and horrors

perpetrated in this age of violence and dehumanization, increased his awareness of the pessimistic, sceptical and antirationalistic trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

From this perspective, Talmon viewed the period leading up to the two world wars as a time in which European society, unhinged from the equilibria of its *anciens régimes* by revolutionary changes in every dimension of material, social and intellectual life, was kept in permanent fermentation by the incredible increase in humanity's power over the natural environment. In this setting, the totalitarian mass movements seemed to provide answers to the quest for principles of order, stability and meaning in an apparently rudderless world, floating in a chaotic, godless universe.

These same problems of stability, leadership, purpose and direction in a secular, urban, atomized mass-society underlie and explain the revolt of the intellectuals against the complacency of the bourgeois mentality. However, far more than this lay behind the critical attitude of the intellectuals toward their time and toward the assumptions of what has been defined by this convention as liberal democracy. They confronted not only the problems arising from the inherent instability of the modern world, but also its unprecedented widening of the horizons of understanding. All of them were affected and influenced by modernity's completely new approach to reality as an object of systematic study, by its discovery of the historicity of human existence, of the great variety of human cultures, of the realm of the mythical and of the subconscious, irrational and religious forces and drives that shape humanity.

In the opening page of *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, Talmon stated:

> From the vantage point of the mid-twentieth century, the history of the last hundred and fifty tears looks like a systematic preparation for the headlong collision between empirical and liberal democracy on the one hand and totalitarian messianic democracy on the other, [a collision] in which the world crisis of today consists.[5]

Our conference takes place at a time when this struggle for supremacy between liberal democracy and the totalitarian ideology of communism seems to have been decided, and an era may have come to an end. The breakdown and openly admitted bankruptcies of the Communist

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5   Idem, *Origins* (above, note 3), p. 1.

regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, suddenly exposed as burnt-out shells haunted by memories of frightful acts of violence and despotism, revealed the absolute inability of communism to create or maintain a viable modern society. The unforgettable uprisings and mass mobilizations which so quickly toppled those regimes in Eastern and Central Europe seem to prove that the quest for freedom and self-determination, the need to vindicate the existential equality and dignity of human beings and their right to live under governments of their choice, belong to the very essence of humanity. Nevertheless, we have not arrived at Fukuyama's Hegelian end of history, nor does the quality of this quest resemble Fukayama's one-dimensional image of liberal democracy.[6] The problems that have haunted the modern era thus far have yet to be solved, and a bewildering number of new ones have been introduced in the areas where the yoke of the totalitarian regimes was broken.

In order to gain a clearer perspective on the historical significance of these events, which may indicate a seminal historical turning point, it is necessary to reconsider the meaning of the term and concept of liberal or pragmatic democracy. Talmon used this term to denote the permanent counterpoint to the evolution of totalitarian democracy, as well as the main target of the critics of modern society. Despite its crucial importance, however, neither Talmon nor the participants in this conference have actually described or analyzed it. It has, rather, been taken for granted; like Godot in Samuel Beckett's play, liberal democracy has not really been introduced to the public or seen on the stage.

This is not by chance. Talmon defined the eighteenth-century Enlightenment roots of the concept of liberalism — namely, the quest for individual liberty and social and political freedom — and the political consequences following from the notion of the existential equality of humankind. However, he could not, even had he so desired, draw a parallel coherent history and ideological genealogy of the liberal democratic tradition, for the simple reason that it did not exist in nineteenth-century Europe in the same way that there existed a Jacobin tradition of democracy.

In Europe, the concept of democracy was largely hamstrung by the idea of the embodiment of the sovereign power and will of the people in the sovereign state. This concept fused the classical

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6   F. Fukuyama, 'The End of History?' *The National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3–18; also the responses of Allan Bloom and others, *ibid.*, pp. 19–35.

idea of democracy and the *politeia* with the Rousseauean-Jacobin model of popular sovereignty promulgated by the French Revolution, producing a model burdened with abhorrent images of past and recent historical experiences of tyranny and of the violence of the masses. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, restricts sovereignty by means of constitutional definitions of the powers and structure of the government, an independent judiciary, and constitutionally secured citizens' rights, based on what are conceived of as fundamental human rights. These limits maximize the sphere of personal and social freedom and guarantee the existence of a free society.

These were the elements and the basic conceptions on which the American republic was reared.[7] Yet, though the French Revolution was deeply influenced by the American example, the course taken by France became the very reason for the separation of the democratic concept from the liberal impulse and ideal. That separation is visible in the writings of Humboldt, Benjamin Constant and John Stuart Mill, and in the various political trends which sought to enlarge the sphere of political rights, personal liberty and constitutional limitation of power. Despite the growing penetration of every aspect of public life by the liberal impulse, the growth of liberty was rarely integrated into the political order to create a stable system of democracy — partly, at least, because the rooted structure of classes and privileges and the social polarization created by ideologically based mass movements made such integration impossible. Democracy became a battleground of interest groups and opposing ideological movements for dominance.[8]

In this context, Isaiah Berlin's distinction between 'negative,' individual freedom and the 'positive' freedom of the citizen to participate in the political life of the commonwealth — a distinction to which Andrew Dobson refers in his discussion of Ortega y Gasset — is highly revealing in its assumption of a fundamental dichotomy between these two concepts of self-realization, which are seen as basically irreconcilable in the realm of the political and social order. Characteristically, Berlin never related to the American concept as relevant to a possible reconciliation of these two kinds of freedom. Like most European thinkers, he never thought in terms of a liberal democracy in which the public and the private spheres of liberty might

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7 See Y. Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964.

8 This was of course the fundamental problem that occupied Alexis de Tocqueville in *De la Democratie en Amerique* and in his *Recollections*.

be reconciled, but referred, rather, to the inherent tension between the principles of liberalism and the dynamics of the sovereign state.[9]

It may be that only now, after two world wars and the destruction or collapse of the totalitarian ideological regimes of secular messianism, are the character and the structural implications of a liberal democracy becoming fully understood in the European context. The frame of reference is changing. Liberal democracy is no longer related solely to the structure of the national state, but also to the emerging framework of wider loyalties which reach out beyond the state to a new internationalism.

The deepening of the democratic egalitarian consciousness, of which Fukuyama speaks, is bound up with a new awareness of the community and interdependence of the life and fate of every person on the globe. That awareness may really bring us to the threshold of the new era which was envisioned by the Enlightenment as the goal of history, and whose fulfillment it defined as the task of humanity: the realization, within history, of the idea of the unity of humankind. Such was the regulative ideal of the 'Republic of Letters' and of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notion of *Humanität*. It inspired Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in Weltbürgerlicher Absicht* and Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tablau historique des progres de l'esprit humain*, as well as the concepts of history delimited by Hegel, Saint-Simon, and the Socialist movement.[10]

The interdependence of all human societies, the factual unity of the world, has been the driving force in twentieth-century history, which has consisted in the struggle for dominance of the great powers and of the totalitarian ideological movements of the right and the left — punctuated by two world wars, innumerable violent confrontations, and the destruction of the nation-state in both the West and the East. The fate of humankind has become, to use the terms of the French Revolution, 'une et indivisible,' welded together by technology and science, by instant communication, and by the *de facto* growth of a world economy and a global public. A common physical, demographic and biological environment has been created — one which now is threatened with extinction through the blind, anarchic and ruthless

9   I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' in idem, *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford 1969, pp. 118–172.
10 See, among others, P. Gay, 'Progress: From Experience to Program,' in idem, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, II, London 1970, pp. 56–125; and J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*, New York 1955.

exploitation of nature by humanity. The full cooperation of all human beings and all peoples in the establishment of a voluntary world order has become the necessary condition for human survival. There is no doubt that the development of frameworks of international cooperation and the establishment of rudimentary structures of world government — the League of Nations, the United Nations, the European Union, all of the various international organizations, and the agreements and charters for securing and maintaining human rights — were inspired by the notion of liberal democracy and are the direct offspring of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

It is from this perspective that the problem of the viability of liberal democracy and its sufficiency for coping with the fundamental problems of human survival must to be viewed. Here, as in many other areas, the concept of federalism, first introduced two hundred years ago by the United States of America, has opened up a new set of possibilities. Liberal democracy must incorporate two basic elements if it is to survive: it must make room for the primeval need that lay at the heart of nationalism, the need of human beings to live in community and to belong to comprehensive frameworks embracing their beliefs, their loyalties and their roots; and it must be inspired by the sense of fraternity and solidarity with all human beings that lay at the core of the socialist vision. The future of freedom and the survival of humanity are not assured; they are the task set for us.

Let me conclude with the parting words of Goethe's *Faust*:

> Ay, in this thought I pledge my faith unswerving,
> Here wisdom speaks its final word and true,
> None is of freedom or of life deserving
> Unless he daily conquers it anew.
> With dangers thus begirt, defying fears
> Childhood, youth, age shall strive through strenuous years,
> Such busy teeming throng I long to see,
> Standing on freedom's soil, a people free.[11]

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11 Goethe, *Faust*, English transl. by P. Wayne, Baltimore 1960, Part II, Act 5, p. 269.

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